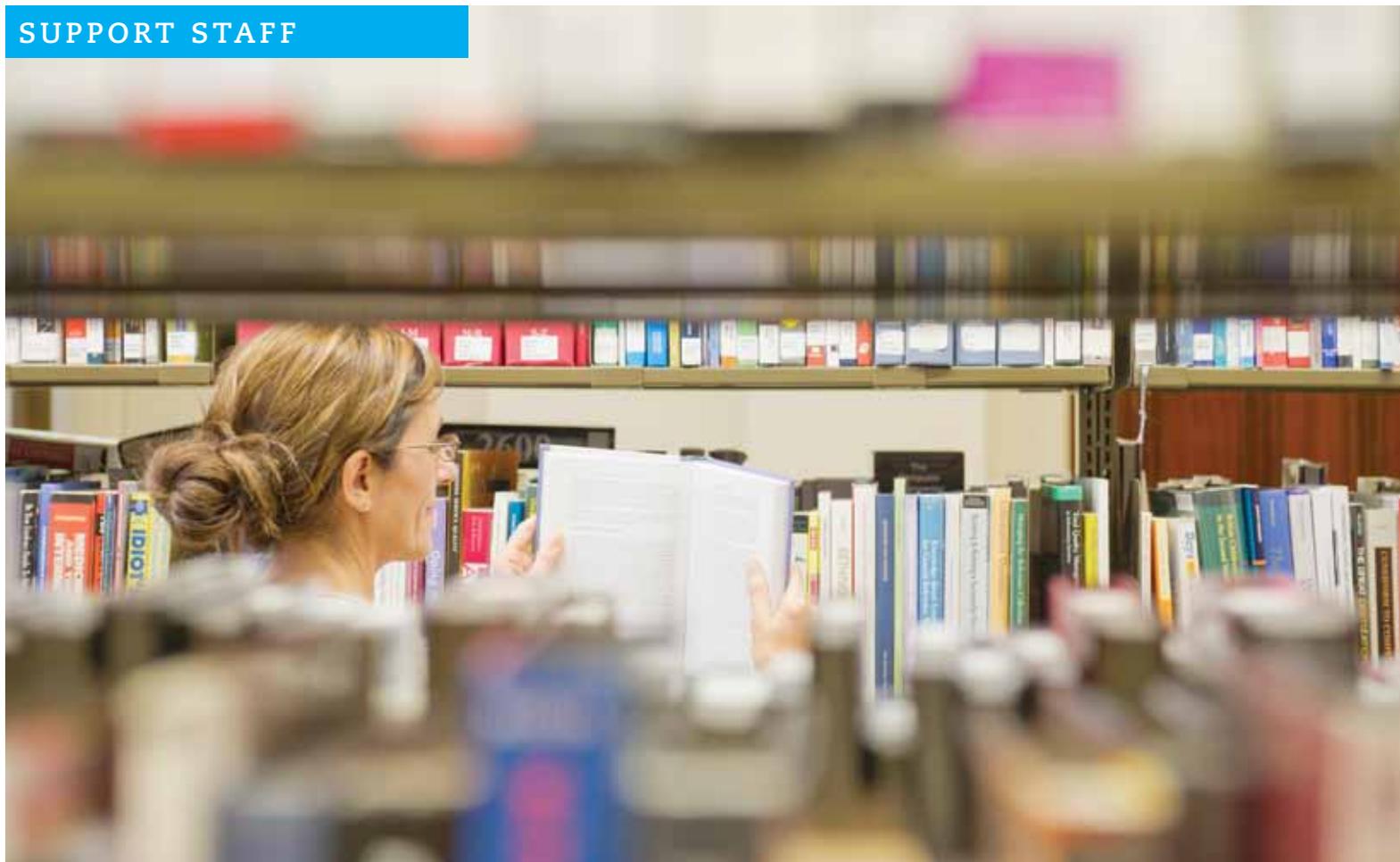


## SUPPORT STAFF



# Loss of school librarians is ‘a national scandal’

*TESS survey reveals that many pupils no longer have access to qualified professionals*

EMMA SEITH

THE ACCESS that Scottish secondary pupils have to qualified school librarians varies wildly between councils and even within them, *TESS* research reveals, prompting concerns about the emergence of a “two-tier system” as budgets tighten.

Our survey of councils comes as East Renfrewshire and Falkirk councils move from having a qualified librarian in all secondaries to having one for every two schools. Scottish Borders Council is also reviewing how it

staffs school libraries, and Argyll and Bute plans to cut all of its secondary school librarian posts from August.

### **Staffed only by assistants**

The *TESS* survey reveals, meanwhile, that East Ayrshire employs no qualified librarians; its school libraries are staffed only by assistants. This is akin to replacing teachers with classroom assistants, said Duncan Wright, the school librarian spearheading the campaign

to save Scotland’s school libraries. The lack of access suffered by some pupils has also been branded a “national scandal” by a leading children’s author.

However, our survey on school libraries shows that the picture is not entirely gloomy: around a third of councils (11 out of 32) continue to run their libraries with qualified staff (see box, opposite).

But of “major concern” are the 19 councils where provision varies from one school to the

next, said Mr Wright. These councils are in danger of diluting further what is on offer, he added, calling on the Scottish government and authorities to invest more in school libraries and librarians.

Mr Wright said: "This survey shows what we had feared: a two-tier system has been created in Scotland in that access to a full-time school librarian is not universal, and that's something that should be of deep concern to parents and politicians."

In Fife, at Madras College in St Andrews, the school library is managed by a full-time librarian along with a library assistant.

**'That access is not universal is something that should be of deep concern to parents and politicians'**

However, in six secondaries under the same local authority, the library is run by a library assistant.

In Inverclyde, all schools have access to a school librarian. But the access varies, from Notre Dame High, which has a full-time

librarian, to St Columba's High, which has one for roughly half the week.

Mr Wright said that the first minister's efforts to promote reading through her Reading Challenge were to be welcomed, as was the push to ensure that every child is a library member. But teenagers are the group of people least likely to visit a public library, he said. School librarians have access to teenagers every day and could put "the right book into the right child's hand at the right time", he said.

### 'Cultural vandalism'

The fact that some pupils lack proper access to a school librarian is "nothing short of a national scandal", according to award-winning children's author Theresa Breslin.

The author, who is a former librarian and current president of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland, described the removal of school librarians in Argyll and Bute as "cultural vandalism". She called for the Scottish government to step in and ring-fence funding for school libraries.

### By the book

Councils that continue to employ a librarian in every secondary school:

- Aberdeen
- Angus
- Clackmannanshire
- Dundee
- East Dunbartonshire
- East Lothian
- Midlothian
- Moray
- North Ayrshire
- North Lanarkshire
- Orkney

## 'I could never work somewhere quiet'

**Lauren Thow, school librarian, Portobello High, Edinburgh**

Tonight is quiz night in Portobello High's school library. Pupils from S1-3 will come together after school to take part. The theme this evening is summer, says librarian Lauren Thow.

The library is open from 8.30am-4.30pm every day and is in use over intervals and the lunch break. After school, as well as hosting a quiz club, the library is the setting for a manga and anime (Japanese animation and comics) club, and at lunchtime on a Monday and Wednesday Ms Thow runs "Books and Baking" and "Comics and Cookies" sessions.

"We use sugar to lure them in," she explains.

Every August there is a trip to the Edinburgh International Book Festival and at the beginning of October the library runs its own literature festival with author events and workshops. In the past these have included illustration, making your own comic and creative writing.

Last year S4-5 pupils went to Gallipoli in Turkey because they were working on a project to mark the centenary of the First World War.

Ms Thow estimates that she

takes roughly three or four classes every day, including literacy lessons in which pupils learn skills such as skimming, scanning, taking notes, research skills and referencing. She also gives reading promotion lessons in which English classes visit the library and participate in activities such as "speed dating with books", where pupils discuss what they are reading.

The amount of activity in the library depends on the time of year. Just now, because of the exams, there are fewer events in order to allow senior students to revise. But the library is still a lively place to work, says Ms Thow. "I could never work somewhere quiet," she adds.



11

The number of councils (out of 32) with a qualified librarian in every secondary every day

19

The number of councils with part-time librarians in their secondaries or a mix of librarians and library assistants

1

The number of councils where libraries are run exclusively by library assistants (East Ayrshire)

1

The number of councils that will have unstaffed school libraries (Argyll and Bute from August)

80%

The proportion of S2 pupils performing well or very well in reading in 2014

55%

The proportion of S2 pupils performing well or very well in writing in 2014

Source: TESS survey on school libraries; Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy 2015, bit.ly/ScotLiteracy

Failure to act could have dire consequences for Scottish children's literature, she warned. Such literature has "flowered" in recent years, she said. This has given Scottish youngsters something they can really relate to but such books are not bought by big chain stores, they are bought by libraries, she added.

### 'Key to e-learning'

Headteachers are "fully behind" the idea of having a full-time librarian in every secondary school, said Jim Thewliss, general secretary of secondary headteachers' organisation School Leaders Scotland. "A librarian does much more for a school than issue and collect books – they help pupils to understand how you use a library, they teach research skills, make links outside the schools so they can bring in authors and poets, and they support subject departments," he said.

Libraries are also key to the growth of e-learning, Mr Thewliss added.

Frank Lennon, the recently retired headteacher of Dunblane High School, in the Stirling council area, said that while everyone was in favour of qualified librarians, they cost as much as a teacher to employ.

He said that faced with shrinking budgets, the decision to employ an English or science teacher rather than replacing a librarian would be "a no-brainer" for some schools.

A Scottish government spokesperson said that libraries continued to "play an important role in local authority schools".

"We have committed funding to develop pilot projects in every local authority area so that children automatically become library members. As part of this scheme, libraries work with schools and communities to promote their services.

"This is in addition to the important role of school libraries", the spokesperson added. ● @TESScotland