

22<sup>nd</sup> February 2023

Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP  
Cabinet Secretary for Education  
Scottish Government, St Andrew's House, Regent Road  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3DG

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

I am writing to you from the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland ([CILIPS](https://www.cilips.org.uk)), the leading professional body for librarians in the country.

I am contacting you to ask for both your support and possibly Scottish Government intervention in the current situation facing school libraries and librarians in Scotland. Whilst I understand that the preference is that local government decisions are left to local authorities, the situation is becoming stark with the following threatened or recently implemented cuts:

- **North Lanarkshire deleting all school library posts and removing library spaces in some schools;**
- **Inverclyde proposing to replace all school librarian posts with assistants from the public library service;**
- **East Renfrewshire proposing to delete all school library posts;**
- **Midlothian proposed to remove all school library posts (postponed temporarily)**

These proposals, with more like them expected due to budgetary challenges, would lead to the entire profession of school librarianship being wiped out in some areas. This would be unlikely to return and would significantly affect the quality of education offered to pupils as well as efforts nationally to improve literacy rates and attainment. These cuts follow over 10 years of service reductions that have already left some authorities with no librarians and many with one between two or more schools.

An extensive [body of evidence](#) highlights the contribution of school librarians to improved exam scores and achievement, and their role in creating a safe, supportive and inclusive learning environment where all pupils have equitable access to curriculum related learning resources. School librarians were instrumental in supporting pupils during the pandemic and we contend that all pupils should have access to a school librarian who can support them through the intersection of formal and informal learning. Librarians, embedded in the infrastructure of the school, understand the education system and can manage resources to support the curriculum, literacy and developing reading.

**Independent schools all maintain relatively well-staffed and funded school libraries and pupils who attend state funded schools should not have to be disadvantaged.**

In 2017, [we met with the then Education Secretary John Swinney](#) to highlight the threat to school library services at the time, including the removal of all school library posts in Argyll and Bute alongside significant cuts elsewhere. We were pleased that this led to the establishment of The National Strategy for School Libraries, [Vibrant Libraries, Thriving Schools](#), and the impactful School Library Improvement Fund. We were also delighted that this saw fewer and less severe cuts to services, recognising what the strategy makes clear: that school librarians are trained and skilled members of school staff, and what they provide cannot be adequately replaced by using teachers, pupils, or public library staff to support school library services.

A campaign in North Lanarkshire has had [widespread support](#) from all over Scotland, including from award winning authors Damian Barr, Kerry Hudson and [Theresa Breslin O.B.E.](#), as well as from [Scottish Book Trust](#), [The Daily Record](#) and [Scotland on Sunday](#). [A petition to save the Council's school librarians has now reached 40,000 signatures.](#)

**School libraries and librarians are highly valued by staff, pupils and parents, and this existential threat to them requires urgent attention. We believe that we need to see not only a continuation of the current national strategy but also some level of statutory service being established to ensure that all pupils retain the right to at least some access to a school librarian, and ideally one in every school.**

We look forward to working with your colleagues in the curriculum unit and other partners on the continued implementation of the strategy and its next steps later this year. However, this will not be soon enough to save an entire profession being wiped out in some Council areas, and I hope that you will agree this requires a more urgent response.

Cuts such as those in East Renfrewshire amount to less than 1% of the savings required for their Education department, yet the impact on young people would be long-term and substantial. Before it is too late, I ask you to do whatever is within your remit to encourage local authorities to rethink these proposals.

Thank you for your time and please get in touch if you would like to discuss this matter further at all.

Yours Sincerely



Sean McNamara, Head of CILIP Scotland