

SECTION TWO

PROVIDING THE SCHOOL LIBRARY

A school library, like any other library, does not happen by chance. It requires four things to make it work. These are: (1) the support of the teachers; (2) a stock of materials; (3) adequate space; and (4) people to run it.

1. Support of the Teachers

No matter how well a school library is organised, it will play its full part in a school only if the school authorities, the head teacher, and the other teachers believe it is important to education. Even if at first only a little can be done, all the teachers should try to develop the library and make use of it. When it grows and can offer more, this will be both a reward and a promise for the future. So before effort and resources are put into the library, the staff of the school - and especially the head teacher - should discuss ways in which the library will be made a central part of the school's work.

2. Stock

Books

The library will require a stock of books. Some should deal with the subjects taught in school. Some should cover the children's outside interests (such as sports and hobbies). Some should serve to stimulate the children's imaginative development.

Take these matters into account when you are stocking the school library. In addition, do not overlook the

need to provide books which will encourage the more reluctant pupils to make use of the library.

Remember that a book is only worth having if it gives pleasure or provides useful information. Do not fill the library with material just to fill the shelves. This wastes space and effort. It makes the useful items more difficult to find among the useless ones. It causes disappointment and the belief that the library is full of worthless, out-of-date or irrelevant material. Fewer items, which are all worth-while and wanted, make a much more effective school library.

Non-Book Materials

In school libraries nowadays, non-book materials are increasingly used. Examples of these are audio-tape cassettes and gramophone records, films and slides, illustrations and wallcharts. For some educational purposes these are more effective than books. For example, a sound recording of a story can often give children a more vivid experience than the written or printed word. A slide or illustration can sometimes make a point more clearly than can words.

The cost of such materials is getting less. So is the cost of the equipment needed to use some of them. Many school libraries can include such material from the beginning. Even where they cannot do so, they should bear them in mind in planning for the future.

The stock of the school library is dealt with in more detail in Section 5.

3. Space in the School Library

A good school library will have enough space to enable the materials to be stored and used in comfort. It will have space for users to go to the shelves and select materials. It will also have space for pupils to work with the materials. Sometimes individual pupils will visit the library. Sometimes a teacher will bring or send a group,

or even a whole class, to study with the help of the library's stock. In either case the children will need space and furniture so that they can sit and read and write in the library.

Space is also needed for organising the library's work. Some will be used for storing and preparing books and other materials before they are added to the library. Some will be needed for the librarian to carry out the work of helping readers and operating the loan of materials. Some will be used for storing those books and other resources which must be kept under close supervision by the librarian (e.g. because they are especially expensive or there is a particular risk of damage). Readers who wish to use these materials will ask the librarian, who will fetch them from this "closed storage".

Library space is dealt with in more detail in Section 3.

4. Staffing the School Library

Those who take charge of a school library must understand, and sympathise with, the educational purpose of the library. They must know how to organise the library so that it can be used effectively. They must be able to show pupils and colleagues on the teaching staff how to use it. They must know how to find out about, and acquire, relevant materials. They must be able and willing to carry out clerical routines. If the library includes audio-visual material and the equipment to use it, they will also need to acquire simple technical skills. Even the simplest work takes time and knowledge. For this reason school libraries, no matter how small, cannot be set up and run properly by someone who is already fully occupied with teaching. Teacher-librarians must have some of their time freed from teaching to allow them the opportunity to carry out their library work thoroughly and effectively.

The additional help of a pupil, a clerical assistant or even a voluntary helper such as a parent, is valuable. Where one or more such persons are available, the teacher-librarian should plan what is to happen and spend time and

effort in making sure that they understand the procedures thoroughly. (See Section 6 in particular).

When the library first begins it may be very small, both in its stock and in the amount of use by pupils and staff. Organising it will require only limited skills. Make sure, however, to carry out the tasks in a correct and thorough way so as to provide firm foundations on which the library can grow.

Larger libraries (those with a large number of pupils, and a comprehensive stock of materials in regular and full-time use) need the services of a full-time librarian. If you work in such a library, and have no other duties to fulfil, never forget that you are there to serve the school. Keep in close touch with the teachers, the school's needs and its future plans. Only in this way can you ensure that the teaching staff and pupils are getting the best library service you can offer. More detailed discussion is given in Sections 5 and 7.

Classroom Collections

It can be useful for a school to have a collection of books in each classroom. This is particularly true when pupils are working on projects, in which case the collections will need to change as one project ends and another begins. Books in classrooms also encourage children to turn to reading for pleasure and recreation and to develop the reading habit.

Classroom collections of this kind should not be developed at the expense of the school library. If the stock of the library is small, it is better to keep everything there. Only when the library has a large enough stock to meet readers' needs should materials be dispersed into classrooms in this way.

When there are classroom collections, it is very important that a record is kept in the library of what they contain and where they are located. This record must be kept up to date, so that anyone needing a book which is in a classroom collection can trace it easily and make use of it.

Finding the Resources

The provision of a school library requires resources of money, space and people. It is important to recognise this at the very beginning, and to be sure that the resources will be available. (See Appendix D.) This means looking ahead not just for one year but for several years. A library which is set up in enthusiasm one year, and then forgotten, is a waste of time, effort and money.

A continuing plan for the development of the library is more important than the amount of resources available. Even a small sum, if it can be relied upon to continue, enables a start to be made. When more is available, development can take place. But a belief in the value of the library, and the promise that, once begun, it will continue, is essential. It requires the continued co-operation of the head teacher and the whole staff of the school.