



MEDIA RELEASE

Lack of funding for library books is why kids are turning off reading, says SLANZA president

“We must protect our school libraries if we want to improve literacy rates for our students.”

CAMBRIDGE, 25 November 2020 – The findings of two Ministry of Education reports based on international research showing lower than average literacy levels in New Zealand students are deeply concerning, says the president of the School Libraries Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (SLANZA).

The reports* released earlier this week address the outcomes of The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), which found the reading levels of New Zealand’s Year 5 students dropped below all other English-speaking countries to 32nd out of 50 countries. New Zealand was also found to have the lowest reading scores among eight OECD nations surveyed.

SLANZA President, Glenys Bichan, says while the reports highlight the urgent need for New Zealand students of all ages to have more and better access to books to enhance reading confidence, much more needs to be done by the Ministry to directly fund school libraries so that they can provide this better access.

“One of the reports says that having access to books means that children are more likely to read, particularly for pleasure, which in turn increases their reading ‘mileage’, as well as their confidence and achievement,” says Ms Bichan.

“The other highlights how using computers for reading activities is linked to students’ attitudes to reading, showing that there is a *direct negative relationship between how often teachers had their students use computers or tablets for reading activities and their liking of reading.*”

Ms Bichan says the reports acknowledge that children need to access books to enhance the development of literacy statistics in New Zealand, and yet due to a funding model that empowers Principals and Boards of Trustees to spend where they see fit, school libraries are being treated as a luxury, rather than as an essential thing in schools.

“Just last week I received ten emails from school librarians around Aotearoa saying that either their budgets are stretched or that they will simply have no money for new books in 2021. Others are saying their libraries are being turned into classrooms because schools ‘need the space’, or now have just two small bookshelves in the staffroom for the students.”

Ms Bichan says New Zealand must protect its school libraries if we want to improve literacy rates for school students.

“Many of these children depend on our library as they can’t afford new books or aren’t able to access the public library,” she says.

“If we want these statistics to change, if we care enough about the literacy rates of the tamariki of Aotearoa then we must protect the place where they have fair, equitable access to books – the school library.”



School Library Association of New Zealand Aotearoa Te Puna Whare Mātauranga a Kura

Ms Bichan says SLANZA has met with the Ministry of Education and that their views were heard, but was concerned that there was no further commitment to change any models of funding that would protect the taonga of a school library.

“Are we prepared to sit back and watch libraries dissolve away from our schools? If this happens, there will only be more reports written in future about our falling literacy levels and how our children need access to books that is fair and equitable.”

To raise awareness of this issue, SLANZA has launched a nationwide campaign to highlight the issues New Zealand’s school libraries are facing, called the School Libraries Transform Campaign, the vision, mission and goal for which are as follows:

Vision Statement

SLANZA believes that all school students in New Zealand, at every level of their education, should have access to effective school library services that will support their reading and learning.

Mission Statement

We plan to promote the value and necessity of every student having access to a school library, supported by a specialist librarian with a budget and hours to provide a high-functioning learning environment within all school communities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Goal

That the Ministry of Education will mandate that every student to have access to a school library staffed by specialist school librarians and is Ministry of Education funded.

For more information on how you can support this campaign, visit the web site at:

<http://www.schoolibrariestransform.org.nz/>

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*The two reports looked at *The importance of success to books and New Zealand students’ reading confidence* and *Using computers for reading activities and students attitudes to reading*.

- <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/pirls-2016-the-importance-of-access-to-books-and-nz-students-reading-confidence>
- https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/204459/PIRLS-SPOTLIGHT-Digital-classrooms.pdf