

Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister of State (Minister for School Standards)
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith St
London
SW1P 3BT

28 August 2024

Dear Minister,

School librarians stand ready to work with you on increasing opportunity for all

Many congratulations on your recent election victory and your appointment as Minister for School Standards.

We write as the leaders of national charities representing school library staff; the School Library Association, the Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) including CILIP's School Libraries Group (CILIP SLG), and the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL).

Together, we support everyone involved in school libraries so that every child can have the best educational experience. Between us we have thousands of members across the UK, and hundreds of volunteers help us to deliver our activities.

We would love to meet with you to discuss how school libraries can support the Government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity for all; not just in their role providing access to books and other resources to support attainment, but also their role in equipping children with the skills which will be needed for careers in an economy of the future, and as informed citizens.

Our members are delivering sessions on media and information literacy, culture and creativity, research and digital skills, as well as encouraging children to develop teamworking skills, grow their confidence, and develop their sense of their place in the world. Where school libraries meet high standards, they are evidenced to improve attainment, attitudes to learning and reading, and self-esteem. Schools and pupils benefit from a properly staffed and resourced school library, which relieves teachers' workload and provides quiet, inclusive study spaces for pupils. School Library Services are a critical enabler within the education system, providing school libraries with resources and expertise to raise reading standards and support the curriculum.

However, schools are increasingly unable to benefit from these vital services, primarily due to the combined pressures of budget pressures and narrow accountability measures.

As you may already know, school libraries are not statutory, and yet many people think they are. Will the new Labour government be looking to increase transparency about this, perhaps by including whether a school has a library in Ofsted inspection reports? It also makes sense for Ofsted to reference the local public library offer for children, given its impact on families, especially disadvantaged families.

The Department for Education does not currently collect any data on school libraries and we have previously been told this would be a waste of money. However, without knowing where there are, and are not, school libraries we cannot identify and then act on trends to raise

standards in an evidence-based way. For example, the [Great School Libraries](#) campaign has conducted research finding regional trends such as schools in the North East being less likely to have school libraries, and schools with a higher proportion of children eligible for Free School Meals being less likely to have a library, less likely to have a librarian, and less likely to have sufficient resources. The research also showed that schools without school libraries depend on local School Library Services and public library provision, meaning a better overall picture is required to understand contributing factors which may be further widening and ingraining educational inequalities and child poverty.

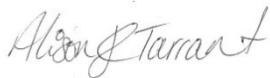
We would also love to have you come and speak at our events. The School Library Association is holding its annual conference in Northampton 6-7 June 2025, and we would be very pleased if you were able to attend and give a short speech to our delegates. Many of them are unclear about how the government view the role of school libraries, and, as with many support staff, feel tired and jaded at the moment. We welcome the announcement of a body to represent school support staff in pay negotiations as a vital step, so thank you for that.

We are also co-hosting a [Libraries Change Lives](#) Parliamentary reception soon focused on Opportunity, an invitation will follow in due course. Again, it would be fantastic if you could join us and say a few words.

Should you wish to discuss the above points, we would be delighted to meet you in Westminster or arrange a school library visit at a time convenient to you.

We wish you all the very best in your role as Minister for School Standards and look forward to working with you over the coming years.

Kind regards,



Alison Tarrant
CEO, School Library Association



Louis Coiffait-Gunn
CEO, CILIP the library & information association



Tabitha Witherick
CEO, Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians



Nick Cavender
Chair, CILIP School Libraries Group