

SECTION ONE

THE PURPOSE OF A SCHOOL LIBRARY

The purpose of a school library is to support the educational work of the school. Everything in the library, and everything about the way it is organised, must be planned so as to help the children. Sometimes this help is given to the children directly, sometimes through their teachers.

The purpose is achieved in two ways. These are:

1. Providing the children with the means of finding whatever information they need.
2. Encouraging them in the habit of using books both for information and for pleasure.

If the school library is to serve this purpose it must be recognised as an essential part of the school's work, and the teaching programme of the school needs to be planned so that the library plays a central part. As an equal duty in this, the library must be organised so that the teachers can rely on it to support the children's learning.

The School Library as an Information Centre

Pupils need information to help them with the subjects they learn in school. The textbooks they use, and the notes they take in class, can be an excellent foundation. They may also be sufficient for revision purposes. But they are not enough to enable pupils to write good essays of their own or to carry out group projects. Other sources of information are therefore needed. If the school library can provide this information, it can become the main learning centre of the school. If it

cannot, the pupils may not have anywhere else to turn for the information they need, and their learning will suffer.

Pupils also need information on subjects not taught in school. Glance at any children's encyclopedia and you will see a multitude of topics which find no place in the classroom but which young people need to know about. If information on these topics is not available in the school library, the pupils may have no other opportunity of finding it.

The school library should therefore be a centre where pupils find information to help them with their school studies and their personal development.

The School Library as a Learning Centre

Research has shown that people learn best when they play an active part in the learning process. When people merely sit and are told something, they learn it less effectively than when they find out the information for themselves. This is the reason why many schools encourage teachers to plan their work so that their pupils make use of books to find information. When this happens, the library becomes the most important learning centre in the school. One of the most important tasks of a school librarian is to organise the library so as to provide this service and to train the pupils to make good use of it.

The provision of this service in no way lessens the importance of the teacher in the classroom. What it does instead is to place increased emphasis on the teacher's role in planning the "discovery" of knowledge. It also helps to widen the range of knowledge and ideas the pupil receives.

The Habit of Using Libraries

When children grow up and leave school they should be aware of the need to continue their education and feel confident in their ability to do so. If their school library has

helped them to find information, they will be encouraged to go on using libraries in later life to find out facts and ideas for themselves. The provision of a well organised library and of training in its use are among the most valuable contributions that a school can make in preparing pupils to continue learning after their formal education comes to an end.

Reading for Pleasure

As a way of using leisure time, reading offers opportunities throughout life. These may be missed if people do not develop the habit of reading for pleasure when they are young. A school library should therefore be able to provide pupils with the means of reading for pure enjoyment. This is particularly important in areas where there are few public library services to provide reading materials for children.

Stories for children are of value because they allow readers to enjoy adventures which they cannot have themselves and to imagine the emotions and relationships which the characters in the stories experience. In this way they help children to develop their own ideas and imaginations in situations they have not yet met. Stories written about the part of the world in which the readers live are likely to be of particular interest. But others are needed too, especially traditional legends and folklore, and books by authors which have a world-wide appeal to the young.

Reading Skills

Learning to read does not end when pupils are capable of deciphering print. It is a skill which grows with practice, and it will decay if it is not used. Pupils who are reading an exciting story, or finding out where petroleum comes from, or looking up the rules of a game, are also, without realising it, developing their reading skill. By providing books for information, recreation and entertainment, and encouraging pupils to read them,

a school library can play a big part in helping the pupils to improve their reading skill and fluency.

Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness is as important as factual information in the development of a mature adult. It is easy to assume that pupils know about the culture in which they are growing up, and the traditions and history which have formed it. But often they do not.

Books are one of the resources which can provide this awareness. However, they are seldom sufficient to reflect the national tradition fully. Newspaper clippings, stories and articles from magazines, pictures, sound recordings, and examples of art and craft, are all important, and the school library should endeavour to collect them.