setting up a school library

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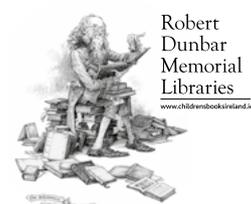
Setting up a school library

The following guidelines are intended to support teachers, parents, guardians and librarians who wish to set up and run a school library. We realise that funding varies hugely from school to school, and that not all of these suggestions may be achievable, but we hope that this guide will be a useful starting point when planning a library from scratch or working with an existing library. Children's Books Ireland's other resources provide further guidance on creating a reading culture in the school (many of these ideas being free or low-budget) and setting up and running a book club. These resources can be accessed these free of charge by visiting childrensbooksireland.ie and clicking 'Resources'.

The function of the school library

The first thing to consider when setting up a school library is its function. A good school library empowers young readers by

- allowing them to expand and enrich their reading experiences
- creating confident and imaginative readers
- supporting integrated, cross-curricular learning
- enabling them to discover and use information
- developing their independent learning and research skills

A good school library promotes reading for pleasure which has myriad intellectual, emotional and social benefits, including an increased knowledge of the self and others, increased self-esteem and social awareness, and greater levels of social interaction and empathy.

When establishing a school library think about

- how it will be used: is the library just for lending or will it also be used as a space to study, research or teach?
- who will use and manage it: will the library be used solely by students or will it also be used for family activities such as book clubs, homework clubs or workshops? Will the library be managed and monitored by staff, parents/guardians, a student committee or some combination of the three?
- what it will be used for: will the library also be used as a maker space or for ICT/digital-literacy training?
- when it will be used: will the library be open to students outside school hours or will there be timetabled visits during the school day?

Creating the environment

The school library should be a welcoming space for students. Ideally, the library should be a whole-school resource and accessible to all, whatever their particular needs. The ideal school library accommodates a fiction and a non-fiction collection, a range of formats and media types, a study space and an informal reading area. The space should be bright, inviting and well laid out. It may be useful to refer to Health and Safety Authority (HSA) guidelines and to the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) Designed for Learning resource when planning the layout of your school library (see additional resources list).

It's not always feasible to have a central school library and small classroom libraries can work very well in the absence of a dedicated library for the whole school. Schools that have a central library and wish to have small collections in classrooms should rotate stock on a regular basis to keep the classroom collection fresh, relevant and interesting.

Shelving

The Library Association and CILIP provide specifications for library shelving (see resource list) but due to budget constraints, for many schools it may not be feasible to invest in specialist library furniture. Library shelving should be safe, sturdy and provide back-edge book support, and ideally shelves will be adjustable to accommodate different formats and media types. Shelf guides can help pupils navigate the shelves and identify sections (e.g. History, Fiction A–C, Graphic Novels, etc.) and face-on book displays make browsing more enticing.

Furniture

Library furniture should be functional, comfortable and adaptable to a range of formal and informal purposes. Ideally, the library will include

- appropriately sized tables and chairs for study and research
- comfortable chairs, bean bags or cushions to encourage reading for pleasure
- workstations for computer use
- a desk and computer for issuing and return of books
- display facilities for pupils' projects, book reviews, recommended reading lists, resources on chosen subjects or themes, information about library activities, new acquisitions, top 10 most borrowed books, etc.

Specialist library furniture, supplies and equipment are available from

- Gresswell: www.gresswell.ie
- AJ Products: https://www.ajproducts.ie/schools-education/library-furniture/18641751.wf
- Parsons: https://www.parsons.ie/category/library-furniture

Signage

Shelf guiding and clear signage will help pupils and staff to navigate and use the library effectively. Signage should include

- shelf guides (e.g. Birds 598)
- signs on bays (e.g. Fiction A–D)
- subjects listed on the ends of bays if you have free-standing shelving (e.g. 900s: 909 World History, 912 Atlases, etc.)
- a wall index with subjects listed alphabetically (e.g. Animals 590, Astronomy 520, Birds 598, etc.)

Collection management

Selecting the right resources is fundamental to the success of the school library. The library will live or die on the strength of its collection and a well-curated collection inspires the imagination, provides for information needs and fosters a lifelong love of reading and learning.

To keep the collection fresh, relevant and appealing to students, the Library Association recommends that 10% of the stock be replaced annually where possible.

Before selecting new resources

- Assess existing stock and weed out any old or tatty books
- Remove items that are in poor physical condition, no longer relevant to the curriculum, contain outdated information or
- Replace culled stock with new editions where necessary and when possible

Selecting new resources

- Liaise with teachers to select curriculum-relevant materials
- Give pupils the opportunity to feed into the selection process by conducting a survey or providing a suggestion box
- Consult recommended reading guides, reviews and periodicals such as the Children's Books Ireland's recommended reading guides and themed book lists, *Books for Keeps*, *School Library Journal*, *The School Librarian*, and BookTrust's booklists
- Select a range of resource types e.g. print books, audiobooks, DVDs, comics, magazines, etc
- Consider the purpose, suitability, medium, format and value for money of each new resource before purchasing
- Refer to the SLA's assessment criteria for fiction, non-fiction and e-resources to determine the suitability of new resources (p. 9)
- Ensure that the overall collection is balanced and represents a diversity of cultures, ethnicities, religions, races, languages, genders and abilities

Procuring new resources

- Contact local booksellers to find out who can offer the best value and enquire about library/school discounts for bulk purchases
- Library suppliers:
    - The Book Nest www.booknest.ie
    - International Education Services www.iesltd.ie
    - O'Mahony's Booksellers www.omahonys.ie

Library organisation

The library should be organised in a clear and logical manner so that students can navigate the collection easily and effectively. In general, the collection should be divided into fiction and non-fiction and sections should be clearly labelled.

Fiction

- Fiction should be arranged alphabetically by the author's surname
- Dividing fiction into age catagories can alienate and stigmatise less confident readers who may not want to be seen choosing a book from a section for younger readers. It may instead be useful to divide fiction into 'Junior' and 'Senior', for example, or to indicate suitability with coloured dots on the book spine (e.g. blue for junior, green for middle, red for senior).

Non-Fiction

- Use broad Dewey classification for non-fiction resources (see below)
- The Dewey Decimal System organises resources into numeric categories; hence, non-fiction resources should be shelved in numeric order, left to right within bays
- The Dewey Decimal System can be daunting at first and if you're unsure of a resource's subject or discipline, search the title on worldcat.org

Picturebooks

- Picturebooks should be shelved separately to fiction or displayed in kinder boxes as they're a larger format but have narrow spines so can get lost unless displayed face out

Dewey Decimal System

- The Dewey Decimal System is used in all public libraries in Ireland and consists of 10 main classes (e.g. 500 Science, 600 Technology, 700 Arts, etc.)
- For an introduction to Dewey classification, see the Online Computer Library Centre's overview here: www.oclc.org/content/dam/oclc/dewey/versions/print/intro.pdf
- A summary of Dewey classes, divisions and sections can be found here: www.oclc.org/en/dewey/features/summaries.html#100

Library Management Systems

A computerised library management system (LMS) allows you to manage your school library electronically. It enables you to create a searchable inventory of stock, including metadata on the title, author, illustrator, subject, ISBN and call number of each book in your collection. An LMS allows you to keep track of what's on loan, to issue items and to check in returned items, and provides useful information on library use, such as circulation statistics.

A computerised LMS is the most effective and efficient way to manage your school library but there are costs involved in setting one up including

- hardware: computer, barcode reader, printer
- software: library management software
- barcodes
- ongoing maintenance, upgrades and support
- staff training

There are a number of LMSs out there, which vary in price and scope, so you will need to do some research before deciding on the one that best suits your school's needs and budget. The Library Association suggests the following system considerations be taken into account:

- does the catalogue offer all the fields you need, i.e. title, author, Dewey classification number, subject keywords, resource type, etc.?
- is the interface user friendly?
- can items be added to added to the catalogue easily?
- is issuing and returning straightforward?
- is there a limit to the number of resources that can be catalogued?
- can items be reserved?
- does the system issue overdue notices?
- does the system generate lists and statistical information?
- does the software provider offer installation and technical support?

Most library management systems operate on a per annum subscription rate depending on the size of the school; however, for some the pricing structure is based on the number of books being catalogued. Talk to colleagues in other schools about what they are using and perhaps pay them a visit to see the system in use. Some popular library management systems to consider are as follows:

- Aladdin library module: primary schools already using the Aladdin school administration software can upgrade their package to include the Aladdin library management system. www.aladdin.ie/upgrade.html#library
- Softlink: https://www.softlinkint.com/product/oliver/
- TinyCat: https://www.librarycat.org/
- Leabharlann: www.leabharlann.ie/LMSGWT/

Additional resources & guidelines

- Become a member of the School Library Association in the Republic of Ireland (SLARI) if budget allows (€100 per annum). The School Library Association provides guidance, support and resources on all aspects of school librarianship, including budgeting, cataloguing and classification, stock selection and library activities
- CILIP Guidance for School Libraries: https://www.cilip.org.uk/news/506793/COVID-19-Guidance-for-School-Libraries.htm
- CILIP - *Designed for Learning: School Libraries:* www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nKzEYPKG1U
- HSA - *Guidelines on Managing Safety, Health and Welfare in Primary Schools:* www.hsa.ie/eng/Education/Managing_Safety_and_Health_in_Schools/Primary_Schools_Guidelines/Guidelines_on_Managing_Safety_Health_and_Welfare_in_Primary_Schools.pdf
- HSA - *Guidelines on Managing Safety and Health in Post-Primary Schools:* https://www.hsa.ie/eng/education/managing_safety_and_health_in_schools/new_guidelines_files/spp-part-a-b-c-interactive-f.pdf
- Library File: Making a Success of the School Library, edited by Valerie Coghlan, Patricia Quigley and Rosemary Walton. Published by the Library Association of Ireland. ISBN: 0-94603-736-1
- SLA Standards for Secondary School Libraries – a web resource by the School Library Association: https://www.sla.intexta.co.uk/standards.php
- The Library Association - *The Primary School Library Guidelines:* librarynext.files.wordpress.com/2008/05/primary.pdf
- The Reading Agency - *Literature Review–The Impact of Reading for Pleasure and Empowerment:* readingagency.org.uk/news/The%20Impact%20of%20Reading%20for%20Pleasure%20and%20Empowerment.pdf
- Children's Books Ireland resources: www.childrensbooksireland.ie/resources/
- Children's Books Ireland recommended reads: https://childrensbooksireland.ie/recommended-reads/