# Written Ministerial Statement

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## Oideachas

### Suíomh Gréasáin Acmhainní Múinteora Sparklebox

***Arna fhoilsiú ag meán lae Dé Máirt 4 Bealtaine 2010***

**An tAire Oideachais (Ms Ruane)**: Beidh a fhios agaibh gur thug mé ráiteas don tionól ar an 8ú Feabhra 2010 faoin suíomh Gréasáin Acmhainní Múinteora Sparklebox. Ag an am sin, chuir mé in iúl do chomhaltaí go raibh imní orm faoi scoileanna ag úsáid an tsuímh Gréasáin Sparklebox, cionn is gur cuireadh an t-iarúinéir agus oibreoir i bpríosún ar 8ú Eanáir 2010 as íomhánna míghnéasacha de pháistí a bheith ina sheilbh agus á ndéanamh aige. Bhí sé cláraithe mar chiontóir gnéis agus ciontaíodh é cheana féin sa bhliain 2005. Chruthaigh sé an suíomh Gréasáin Sparklebox i mí Feabhra 2006 le hacmhainní in-íoslódáilte teagaisc a chur ar fáil saor in aisce. Bhí fáil ag scoileanna air trína gcórais C2k (soláthraíonn C2k seirbhís bhainistithe ICT do gach scoil anseo).

B'ábhar mór imní dom gur chuala C2k faoi chás Sparklebox den chéad uair i mí na Nollag, ach níor chuir siad bac le rochtain ar an suíomh Gréasáin ar líonra na scoileanna go dtí 1ú Feabhra. Dhírigh Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne Bhéal Feirste aird mo Roinne ar an cheist Déardaoin 28ú Eanáir, agus d'inis an Roinn dom Dé hAoine 29ú Eanáir. Chreid mé, agus creidim go fóill, gur chóir gur insíodh dom i bhfad níos luaithe. Cé is moite de cheist an ama, bhí mé ag iarraidh a chinntiú nach raibh an suíomh ina bhaol do pháistí.

## Education

### Sparklebox Teacher Resource Website

***Published at noon on Tuesday 4 May 2010***

**The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane)**: You will recall that on 8th February 2010 I made a statement to the Assembly about the Sparklebox Teacher Resource website. At that time I informed Members that I had concerns about use of the Sparklebox website by schools, as the former owner and operator had been jailed on 8th January 2010 for making and possessing indecent images of children. He was a registered sex offender, having previously been convicted in 2005. The Sparklebox website was created by him in February 2006 to provide free downloadable teaching resources. It was available to schools via their C2k systems (C2k provides a managed ICT service to all schools here).

I was greatly concerned to learn that C2k first knew about the Sparklebox issue in December, but did not block access to the website on the schools network until 1st February. The Belfast Education and Library Board brought the matter to my Department's attention on Thursday 28th January, and the Department informed me on Friday 29th January. It was, and still is my view, that I should have been informed much earlier. Beyond the timing issue, I was anxious to confirm that the site posed no threat to children.

Nuair a labhair mé libh i mí Feabhra dúirt mé go raibh mé ag iarraidh bheith cinnte de go mbeadh freagairtí ar chúinsí áirithe chás Sparklebox comhréireach agus tráthúil. D'ordaigh mé don Roinn dhá rud a dhéanamh. Ar an chéad dul síos, d'iarr mé orthu scríobh chuig Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Iarthair, ag éileamh air iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar an dóigh ar láimhseáil C2k an cás agus moltaí a dhéanamh. Chomh maith leis sin, d'iarr mé ar an Roinn athbhreithniú a dhéanamh lena dhearbhú cé acu a bhí a gcuid nósanna imeachta agus prótacal inmheánach féin láidir go leor.

When I came before you in February I said that I needed to be assured that responses to the particular situation surrounding Sparklebox were proportionate and timely. I instructed my Department to do two things. First, to write to the Chief Executive of the Western Education and Library Board, requiring him to investigate the manner in which the situation was handled by C2k and to make recommendations. Second, I wished the Department to carry out a review to determine if its own internal procedures and protocols were sufficiently robust.

Tá an dá athbhreithniú faighte agam agus chinntigh mé gur cuireadh cóipeanna díobh i Leabharlann an Tionóil agus ar shuíomh Gréasáin na Roinne. Ba mhian liom na príomhcheisteanna a sainaithníodh sa dá athbhreithniú a lua agus cuntas a thabhairt ar na bearta ba mhian liom a bheith i bhfeidhm le sábháilteacht na bpáistí inár scoileanna a chinntiú.

I have now received both reviews and I have ensured that copies have been placed in the Assembly Library and on the Department's website. I now wish to detail the key issues identified by both reviews and to outline the actions that I want to see taken to ensure the safety of children within our schools.

Is léir ó thuairisc Bhord an Iarthair go ndearna C2k measúnuithe ar shuíomh Gréasáin Sparklebox i mí na Nollag, nuair a cuireadh ciontú an úinéara in iúl dóibh agus ag an am sin, fuair siad nach raibh an suíomh ina bhaol do pháistí.

It is clear from the Western Board report that C2k conducted assessments of the Sparklebox website in December, when it was notified of the then owner's conviction and at that time found that the site posed no risk to children.

Is tábhachtach a thabhairt faoi deara gur cuireadh bac leis na codanna idirghníomhacha den suíomh trí líonra na scoileanna agus gur thug an suíomh rochtain ar acmhainní a bhí úsáideach do – agus a bhí in úsáid go forleathan ag – scoileanna. Ba é an cheist a bhí ann ná oiriúnacht rochtain leanúnach scoileanna ar shuíomh Gréasáin ar le duine é ar ciontaíodh as coir in aghaidh páistí é. Nuair a rinne C2k measúnú ar an suíomh agus nuair a mheas siad é a bheith oiriúnach do rochtain leanúnach scoileanna, bhí fócas acu ar ábhar an tsuímh. Coinnigh C2k an suíomh faoi athbhreithniú.

It is important to note that the interactive parts of the site were blocked via the schools' network and that the site did provide access to resources that were of use to – and widely used by - schools. The question to be addressed was rather the appropriateness of continued access by schools to a website owned by a person who had been convicted of a crime against children. When C2k assessed the site and considered it to be suitable for continued access by schools, its focus was on content. C2k continued to keep the site under review.

Aithníonn an tuairisc saincheisteanna a bhain le heolas a chomhroinnt le C2k agus moltar go ndéanann na comhlachais ábhartha in Éirinn nó sa Bhreatain athbhreithniú ar na socruithe reatha do thuairisciú agus do shreabhadh eolais ó agus chuig an Regional Broadband Consortia. Tacaím go hiomlán leis an mholadh seo nó tá mé cinnte dearfa de go bhfuil gá le feabhsú sa réimse seo.

The report points up issues around the sharing of information with C2k and recommends that the relevant bodies in Ireland and Britain conduct a review of current arrangements for the reporting and flow of information from and to the Regional Broadband Consortia. I fully endorse this recommendation as I am convinced that there is a need for improvement in this area.

Go deimhin, sula bhfuair mé tuairisc Bhord an Iarthair, scríobh mé chuig mo chomhghleacaithe i ndeisceart na hÉireann, i Sasana, in Albain agus sa Bhreatain Bheag, ag iarraidh orthu beart a ghlacadh le córais níos fearr a chur i bhfeidhm a chinnteoidh go nglacfar beart lena chur in iúl d'údaráis ábhartha chomh luath is a chiontaítear duine as cionta ábhartha. Glacadh rófhada gur cuireadh na ceisteanna faoi úinéir Sparklebox in iúl do C2k. Beidh mé ag iarraidh tacaíochta ó mo chomhghleacaithe sa Choiste Feidhmiúcháin, go háirithe ón Aire Sláinte agus ón Aire Cirt, le brú ar aghaidh le heolas a chomhroinnt ar bhealach níos fearr, a chuideoidh lenár gcuid páistí a chosaint.

Indeed, in advance of taking receipt of the Western Board report, I had already written to my counterparts in the south of Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales, calling for action to be taken to put in place better systems for ensuring that action is taken to inform relevant authorities as soon as someone is charged with relevant offences. It took too long for C2k to be notified of the issues surrounding Sparklebox's owner. I will be looking to my Executive colleagues, in particular the Health Minister and the Justice Minister, for support in continuing to push for better sharing of information that can help protect our children.

Tá mé diongbháilte de go ndéanfaidh mo roinn féin a seacht ndícheall i dtaca le soiléire a thabhairt sa chumarsáid a dhéanann siad le scoileanna agus leis na comhlachais a thacaíonn leo. Mar sin de, eiseoidh muid treoir shoiléir agus prótacail shoiléire maidir le húsáid ábhar agus acmhainní sa seomra ranga ó shuíomhanna Gréasáin ar chuir C2k bac leo.

I am also determined that my own department will not be found wanting in the clarity of its communication with schools and the bodies that support them. We will therefore issue very clear guidance and protocols regarding the use in the classroom of materials and resources which have originated from websites blocked by C2k.

Ardaítear roinnt ceisteanna níos forleithne in athbhreithniú Bhord an Iarthair fosta, amhail an gá le straitéis chumarsáide a shonraíonn meicníocht réasúnta phraiticiúil tuairiscithe le haghaidh ceisteanna cosanta páistí chuig DE. Beidh mo chuid oifigeach ag oibriú le comhghleacaithe i Ranna agus in eagraíochtaí eile le teacht ar an bhealach is fearr chun tosaigh maidir leis na ceisteanna níos forleithne seo.

There are also some wider issues highlighted in the Western Board review, such as the need to develop a communications strategy detailing a sensible and practical reporting mechanism for child protection issues to DE. My officials will be working with colleagues in other Departments and organisations to chart the best way forward regarding these wider issues.

Beidh Bord an Iarthair ag éileamh ar C2k athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar a nósanna imeachta caighdeánacha oibrithe agus measúnaithe le déileáil le ceisteanna, ceisteanna cosanta páistí san áireamh, nach bhfuil mar chuid de ghnáthphróisis fhormhéadaithe C2k. Forbróidh an t-athbhreithniú seo nósanna imeachta soiléire ar an bhealach ar chóir do C2k dul i mbun cúrsaí bainistithe, comhairlithe agus cumarsáide, lena n-áirítear ceanglas gur chóir do Bhord Bainistíochta C2k comhairle a lorg ó na húdaráis ábhartha láithreach.

The Western Board will also require C2k to review its standard operating and assessment procedures to deal with issues, including child protection issues, which lie outside C2k's normal escalation processes. This review will develop clear procedures on how C2k should manage, consult and communicate, including a requirement that the C2k Management Board should seek immediate advice from the appropriate authorities.

Tá mé den tuairim gur chóir gur cuireadh in iúl don Roinn, agus domsa mar Aire, faoin cheist seo agus faoi na bearta réamhchúraim atá á nglacadh i bhfad níos luaithe ná mar ar cuireadh. Ní mór dúinn uile foghlaim ón eispéireas seo agus tá mé ag cur in iúl go soiléir go bhfuil mé ag dúil leis go dtabharfaidh gach eagraíocht a bhfuil baint acu le cúrsaí oideachais le fios don Roinn láithreach nuair a thagann aon cheisteanna nó ábhair imní chun solais a d'fhéadfaí tionchar réigiúnach bheith acu.

I take the view that the Department, and I as Minister, should have been informed at a much earlier date about this issue and about the precautionary measures being taken. We must all learn from this experience and I am making clear my expectation that all education partners will advise the Department immediately when any issue or concern arises which may have a regional impact.

Ba mhaith liom díriú anois ar an athbhreithniú ar bhearta mo Roinne féin agus iad ag láimhseáil an eolais a fuair siad faoi Sparklebox. Rinneadh an t-athbhreithniú seo faoi stiúradh na Foirne Iniúchóireachta Inmheánaí.

I want to turn now to the review of my own Department's actions in handling the information it received about Sparklebox. This review was carried out under the supervision of its Internal Audit Team.

Thaispeáin an t-athbhreithniú gur ghníomhaigh an Roinn go luath leis an chás a shoiléiriú agus gur ghlac siad bearta cuí a luaithe is a rinne Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne Bhéal Feirste teagmháil leo Déardaoin an 28ú Eanáir. Tá an Fhoireann Athbhreithnithe sásta go bhfuil an struchtúr sa Roinn le haghaidh soiléire ról agus freagrachtaí a chinntiú i gcúrsaí cumhdaigh, go bhfuil sé éifeachtach agus gur fheidhmigh sé go maith sa chás seo.

The review indicated that when the Department was contacted by Belfast Education and Library Board on Thursday 28th January, it moved quickly to clarify the position and to take appropriate action. The Review Team is satisfied that the structure within the Department for ensuring clarity about roles and responsibilities in safeguarding matters is effective and worked well in the situation.

Freagróidh mé ar ball do Bhord an Iarthair faoina n-athbhreithniú agus beidh mé ag amharc ar an chás lena chinntiú go gcuirfear na moltaí ar fad i bhfeidhm. Chuige sin beidh mé ag iarraidh an t-eolas is déanaí ar an dul chun cinn a fháil ó mo Roinn ar bhonn rialta.

I will respond shortly to the Western Board about its review and I will be taking an active interest in the implementation of all of the recommendations. To this end I will be seeking regular updates from my Department on how matters are progressing.

Ba mhaith liom a shonrú go soiléir – níl aon amhras ann ach go gcuireann ICT deiseanna iontacha ar fáil do dhaoine óga lena bheith ag foghlaim agus le sult a bhaint as an fhoghlaim. Is mar gheall air sin go bhfuil úsáid ICT ina croíchuid den churaclam athbhreithnithe agus tá fócas againn ar thacaíocht do dhaltaí lena scileanna ICT a fhorbairt.

Let me be clear – there is no doubt that ICT provides our young people with wonderful opportunities to learn and to enjoy learning. For that reason the use of ICT is a core part of our revised curriculum and our focus is on supporting pupils to develop their ICT skills.

Caithfidh muid iad a choinneáil slán ó gach dochar agus iad ag foghlaim. Beidh sé mar phríomhthosaíocht agam i gcónaí sábháilteacht agus leas na bpáistí agus na ndaoine óga a chinntiú, mar aon leis an tacaíocht a thugann muid do na múinteoirí agus ceannairí scoile agus iad ag oibriú leis na páistí agus na daoine óga a choinneáil slán.

We must also, however, keep them safe from harm while they learn. For me the key priority will always be the safety and wellbeing of our children and young people, and the support we provide to their teachers and school leaders in working to keep them safe.

Le gach rud atá foghlamtha againn ón chás seo agus na bearta atá glactha agam le baol an atarlaithe a ísliú, creidim go gcuirfidh an cás seo le cumas na múinteoirí chun páistí a choinneáil slán agus iad ag úsáid an idirlín ar scoil.

What has been learned from this situation and the steps I have taken to minimise the risk of recurrence will, I believe, make a real contribution to helping our teachers and to keeping our children safe when they are on-line in school.