

SSITA

Safe Schools Information Technology Alliance

June 8th.2018

Open letter to The Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP, Secretary of State for Education, Department for Education, 20 Great Smith St, Westminster, London SW1P 3BT.

Dear Mr Hinds,

Further to my previous correspondence with DfE, I have in recent weeks sent emails to DfE and received responses - Reference number: 2018-0013656.

I write to you now regarding the response that I received from DfE to my question to Indra Morris. My question to her, on 19th March 2018, was:

“We would like Indra Morris to read the attached peer-reviewed paper by Dr Sarah Starkey on the AGNIR Report 2012 - which is the Report so heavily relied upon by schools and by yourselves at DfE:

<https://www.degruyter.com/view/j/reveh.2016.31.issue-4/reveh-2016-0060/reveh-2016-0060.xml?format=INT>

In the light of the inaccurate and misleading information within AGNIR 2012, as presented here by Dr Starkey, could you please advise as to how you will be updating your advice to schools, based on the evidence of risk of harm as given in Dr Starkey's paper and its supplementary information?”

In their response, DfE did not acknowledge whether or not they had read Dr Starkey's paper and they did not answer the question. Instead, DfE responded:

“The department provides advice to schools on health and safety. It is for individual schools to decide whether or not to implement Wi-Fi technology in order to meet their needs. Public Health England leads on this issue and has advised that it sees no reason why schools should not use Wi-Fi equipment. Schools must take reasonable steps to ensure that staff and pupils are not exposed to risks to their health and safety by conducting a risk assessment and, if necessary, putting measures in place to minimise any known risk.”

My question referred to the evidence of risk of harm, but also to the justification for DfE to both require and enable a risk assessment to be undertaken by schools against the backdrop of previously missing “need to know” information, as provided by Dr Starkey's peer-reviewed paper of December 2016. For schools to be able to carry out an effective risk assessment as part of their safeguarding responsibilities in relation to the increasing cumulative exposures within the school environment, they need to be accurately informed. Since the publication of Dr Starkey's paper, AGNIR has been disbanded. Yet schools are expected to quote from this body without being made aware that it no longer exists.

Some years ago, I asked Ofsted for their position on Wi-Fi in schools. Their Spokesman confirmed to me what we have always understood to be their position, that whether the curriculum is delivered by Wi-Fi or wired Ethernet is not in their remit. The Ofsted Spokesman continued: “I would say that **SSITA** is doing a good job and that you are now at the point where you could consider legal action against an individual school.” I replied that as a former teacher I did not believe that there was a Headteacher who would willingly expose the children in his or her care to serious risk, if he or she had been provided with *full* knowledge of those risks.

The problem is that Headteachers and Senior Management Teams seem largely unaware that Wi-Fi is classified as a Class 2b (possible) human Carcinogen and that authoritative international opinion now favours it to be elevated to a Class 2A (probable) or Class 1 (definite) Carcinogen. UK school children may therefore have been at a greater risk than previously acknowledged.

As a second illustration, regarding the failures of the UK Government to ensure that schools and Senior Management Teams are provided with appropriate knowledge on a “need to know” basis - it was brought to my attention some years ago that a UK secondary school was about to introduce mobile phones into the curriculum. During a brief and civil telephone conversation with the Deputy-Head, I introduced myself as from *SSITA*, and as a former teacher and LEA governor. I was anxious to reassure him that I understood what it was like to be a teacher and that I fully understood the attraction of this technology within the classroom. I asked him three questions:

Me: Are you aware that in April 2011 (i.e. the previous year) The Council of Europe passed the draft Resolution 1815 in which they voted unanimously to ban Wi-Fi and mobile phones in schools and that on 27th May 2011, The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe called on Member States to reduce exposure to radiofrequency electromagnetic fields, asking for particular attention to be given to children and young people, who are most at risk, and called for restrictions on the use of wireless technologies (Wi-Fi) in schools with a clearly stated recommendation for **fully-wired networks** to be used?

His reply: No

Me: Are you aware that a month later, IARC (The International Agency for Research on Cancer - part of the World Health Organisation) classified this kind of radiation as a 2b possible Carcinogen?

His reply: No

Me: Are you aware the UK Chief Medical Officers recommend that children under sixteen should use mobile phones for *essential* calls only?

His reply: **Why hasn't anyone told us this?**

This is a conversation which could have occurred with practically any state school in the UK. I know of Headteachers who, having just spent thousands of pounds on updating the Wi-Fi – have indicated to me that they would have held back on doing so if only they had been in possession of all the facts at the time of procurement.

We have now formally made you aware of the problems with the AGNIR 2012 Report. There are many who think that AGNIR 2012 should be withdrawn, but what I am asking here is that you at least read Dr Starkey's paper and make schools aware of its contents, so that Headteachers and Senior Management Teams can at least come to circumspective decisions from now on. This is *clearly* an emerging risk of some significance and especially so given the cumulative and accumulating exposures of microwave radio-frequency radiation within the school environment.

Yours sincerely

Diana Hanson

SSITA

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