

## THE TEACHING AGENCY

Decision of a Professional Conduct Panel and the Secretary of State

**Teacher:** Dr Earl Beckles

**Teacher ref no:** 87/381470

**TA Case ref no:** 5125/Conduct

**Date of Determination:** Monday 18 June 2012

**Former Employer:** Educare Adolescent Services Limited  
– Trinity College, Loughborough

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### **A. Introduction**

A Professional Conduct Panel (“the Panel”) of the Teaching Agency convened on Monday 18 June 2012 at 53-55 Butts Road, Earlsdon Park, Coventry, CV1 3BH to consider the case of Dr Earl Beckles.

The Panel members were:-

Mrs Jennifer Sims - Professional Panelist.  
Mr Anthony Bald - Professional Panelist.  
Mr William Brown - Lay Panelist.

The Legal Adviser to the Panel was Mr Paddy Roche of Morgan Cole LLP, Oxford.

The Presenting Officer for the Teaching Agency was Mrs Kate Bear of Browne Jacobson LLP, Nottingham.

Dr Earl Beckles was not present and was not represented.

The hearing took place in public and was recorded.

### **B. Allegations**

The Panel considered the allegations set out in the Notice of Proceedings dated 20 March 2012.

It was alleged that Dr Earl Beckles was guilty of Unacceptable Professional Conduct in that:-

Whilst employed by Educare Adolescent Services Limited as a Head Teacher at Trinity College, Loughborough, between 21 February 2010 and 26 June 2010 he:-

1. Sexually harassed four female members of staff:-
  - a. Witness B
  - b. Individual A
  - c. Individual B
  - d. Individual C;
2. Made inappropriate and excessive use of the Company mobile phone;
3. Misappropriated Company funds as a result of excessive use of a Company mobile;
4. Kept inappropriate adult images on his Company mobile phone.

The Teacher did not admit the facts.

### **C. Summary of Evidence**

#### Documents

In advance of the hearing the Panel received a bundle of documents which included:-

Section 1	Anonymised Pupil List.	NA.
Section 2	Notice of Proceedings and Response	Pages 1 to 13.
Section 3	Witness Statements	Pages 14 to 19.
Section 4	Teaching Agency Documents - Plus Additional Documents	Pages 20 to 168 Pages 169 to 176 (as above).

The Panel Members confirmed that they had read all of the documents in advance of the hearing.

#### Summary of evidence

The Presenting Officer called two witnesses to give evidence as follows:-

**Witness A** who adopted his witness statement at Pages 14 to 17 in the case bundle and gave evidence about:-

- His position as Director of Educare Adolescent Services Limited.
- His involvement in the investigation of Dr Beckles in relation to sexual harassment of Trinity College employees and inappropriate use of a Company mobile phone issued to him.

- Interviews held with four members of staff who made complaints about being sexually harassed by Dr Beckles and his impression of their reliability.
- Examination of Dr Beckles Mobile phone and the images found on it and details of the mobile phone invoice.
- Interviews with Dr Beckles and the explanation and accounts given by the Teacher who broadly denied the allegations while accepting that he was responsible for the company issued mobile phone.
- The disciplinary process adopted at Trinity College during the investigation and subsequent to it.
- Dr Beckles initial suspension and ultimate resignation as Head Teacher of Trinity College on 26 June 2010.

**Witness B** who adopted her witness statement at Pages 18 to 19 of the case papers and gave evidence about:-

- Her working relationship with Dr Beckles and his behaviour towards her detailing specific incidents of inappropriate conduct.
- Other incidents involving other staff members that she witnessed and discussions that she had with other members of staff.
- Her reaction to Dr Beckles and the effect of his conduct on her.
- Her position on the staff at Trinity College and Dr Beckles' wider impact following his appointment as Headteacher including improvements that he introduced while in post.

#### **D. Panel's Decision and Reasons**

The Panel announced its decision and reasons as follows:-

"We have now carefully considered the case before us and have reached a decision.

We confirm that we have read all the documents provided in the bundle in advance of the hearing.

The case concerns Dr Beckles' conduct while the Head Teacher of Trinity College Loughborough which is a Special Independent School for boys and girls aged from 11 to 16 years of age with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Dr Beckles was appointed Head Teacher of the School on 21 February 2010. On 26 May 2010 he was suspended as a consequence of allegations of sexual harassment by a number of members of staff at Trinity College. He resigned from his position as Head Teacher on 26 June 2010.

Allegations of sexual harassment were made by four female members of academic and support staff at the School. Each member of staff made a written statement concerning Dr Beckles alleged behaviour towards them in the course of an investigation carried out by Witness A, Director of Educare Adolescent Services in June 2010.

The allegations included making inappropriate comments to the staff often of a sexual nature, attempting to kiss members of staff, cuddling staff members and similar conduct. Some of the witnesses described feeling uncomfortable in the presence of Dr Beckles and on several occasions verbally objecting to his conduct.

These allegations were put to Dr Beckles in the course of an interview with Witness A on 8 June. The interview meeting was formally recorded and during it Dr Beckles broadly denied behaving in the way alleged.

During the course of the investigation telephone bills relating to the Company mobile phone issued to Dr Beckles were seen by the Investigating Officer and are exhibited in the case papers. The total bill incurred in relation to use of the Company mobile phone totalled in the region of £4000 between the period of 12 May 2010 to 20 June 2010.

Dr Beckles was asked to attend a further disciplinary investigation interview which took place on 25 June 2010 in which he took responsibility for the mobile phone bill and agreed to pay it back. He said that he was shocked at the bill and explained that his relatives who had come to support him had given the mobile phone to their children and costs had been incurred.

Finally on interrogation of the mobile phone by Witness A certain adult photographs were discovered on it. It is alleged by the Teaching Agency that as a consequence of this behaviour Dr Beckles is guilty of Unacceptable Professional Conduct

#### Findings of fact

Our findings of fact are as follows:-

We have found the following particulars of the allegations against Dr Earl Beckles proven:-

Whilst employed by Educare Adolescent Services Limited as a Head Teacher at Trinity College, Loughborough between 21 February 2010 and 26 June 2010 Dr Earl Beckles:-

1. Sexually harassed four female members of staff:-
  - a. Witness B
  - b. Individual A
  - c. Individual B
  - d. Individual C;

Our reasons are that we have carefully listened to and tested, by our own questions, the evidence given to the hearing by both Witness A and Witness B. We felt that Witness A was a witness who provided a careful account of his investigation and we believed him. He was clear that he had approached the interviews with each member of staff aware of the possibility that the witnesses may have colluded together. He was accompanied by a note taker. He told us that he was impressed by the accounts that the members of staff provided to him. The witnesses were very distressed in the course of explaining how Dr Beckles had behaved towards them – he felt sure their distress was genuine. He told us that none of the staff members wanted to be involved in the process and wanted the issue to go away.

We felt able to accept his evidence and to rely on his assessment of the evidence. Similarly we heard Witness B give evidence of her experience of Dr Beckles. Again we were satisfied that she also told the truth and could be believed.

Against that background we have considered the notes of the interviews prepared with each complainant – all of which are signed. We have been through each individual account carefully. Each member of staff recounts more than one incident of unwelcome sexual behaviour by Dr Beckles and their reaction to this – in some cases several incidents are described. On the balance of probabilities we conclude that these incidents did occur as described by each staff member concerned. By contrast we found the explanations and denials made by Dr Beckles to be unconvincing thus confirming Witness A's impression.

We therefore find the particulars set out at 1 a-d proved.

2. Made inappropriate and excessive use of the Company mobile phone;

We have relied on the mobile phone invoice exhibited in the case papers at pages 51 - 68. It is clear from this document – and accepted by Dr Beckles – that the call cost limit of £30 per month reported to us by Witness A has been massively exceeded. As this was a mobile telephone issued by the Company to Dr Beckles for professional use only we consider that the Headteacher carried a responsibility to ensure that the use made of that telephone, by himself or others, was limited to purposes directly connected with his employment. To allow the telephone to be used by others to the extent disclosed by the invoice clearly did not meet that criterion and Dr Beckles must bear responsibility for the extent of that unauthorised use.

4. Kept inappropriate adult images on his Company mobile phone.

Our reasons are that we heard evidence from Witness A on this particular which we believed. He was clear that when Dr Beckles telephone was examined there were images on it of both male and female genitalia. Dr Beckles himself acknowledges that there were images of female genitalia and gave an explanation as to how those images came to be on the telephone. This particular is proved.

We have found the following particulars of the allegation against Dr Beckles not proven, for these reasons:

3. Misappropriated Company funds as a result of excessive use of the Company mobile;

Our reasons are that we do not fully understand how this particular is presented by the Teaching Agency nor what it adds to the facts of Particular 2 and therefore we find it not proved.

#### Findings as to Unacceptable Professional Conduct

Dr Beckles held a position of authority at Trinity College as its headteacher. It was incumbent upon him to set an example and particularly to treat colleagues with dignity. He abjectly failed to do so and behaved towards several junior members of staff in a way that was wholly inappropriate and unacceptable. He caused considerable distress and anxiety by his failure to observe proper professional boundaries and to respect the rights and welfare of others. It was a major part of his duties to develop effective professional relationships with colleagues and in this responsibility he fell woefully short. We consider that in relation to his conduct towards junior members of staff he is guilty of unacceptable professional conduct.

In relation to his mobile phone as issued by the company he failed to ensure that it was used responsibly both as to the use of the telephone which resulted in costs totalling in the region of £4000 and the storing of inappropriate adult images on the device. We are of the view that even if Dr Beckles explanations in relation both to the invoice and the photographs are accepted, this case still discloses a serious lack of judgement and absence of responsibility which reflects very badly on a headteacher. The cost of calls incurred was way in excess of the permitted limit and it cannot, in our view, possibly be argued that the storage of the sort of images discovered can ever be justified on a company issued telephone in an educational environment. His conduct in relation to the telephone therefore also contributes to our finding of Unacceptable Professional Conduct in this case.

#### **Panel's Recommendation to the Secretary of State**

**We recommend that a Prohibition Order should be made in this case. The evidence discloses a pattern of behaviour involving several junior members of staff .The harassment of the staff members is made all the more serious by virtue of the fact that Dr Beckles held the position of Headteacher at the time. We are enormously concerned that Dr Beckles appears to be in denial both as to the gravity of his conduct towards his staff and also misuse of the mobile telephone issued to him. We do not detect any insight on his part into the effect of his behaviour on others or his inappropriate use of the telephone issued to him.**

**There appears to be an attempt by him to deny responsibility for what occurred. We believe this case discloses a deep seated attitudinal issue in relation to Dr Beckles which lead to the harmful behaviour which understandably caused upset and distress to the complainants.**

**A grave feature of this case is that Dr Beckles abused his position of trust and thereby attempted to take advantage of junior staff members. We believe that the public interest requires that he should be prohibited.**

**In short this case discloses a serious departure from the personal and professional standards expected of a Headteacher which requires the imposition of a Prohibition Order without limit of time.**

#### **Secretary of State's Decision and Reasons**

**I have considered carefully the panel's findings of fact in this case and their findings of unacceptable professional conduct. I have noted that not all of the allegations were found proven, but have read the panel's reasons for finding unacceptable professional conduct. This was a serious case and the panel are clear as to why they have found the facts proven and why they amount to unacceptable professional conduct.**

**I support the decision made by the panel in respect of the facts of the case and as to unacceptable professional conduct. This case is a serious departure of the standards expected of a teacher and indeed a headteacher.**

**I have also considered the recommendation of the panel in respect of the review period. The lack of insight shown coupled with the seriousness of the matters found support the recommendation that there should be no period of review. I too support that for the reasons given.**

**This means that Dr Earl Beckles is prohibited from teaching indefinitely and cannot teach in any school, sixth form college, relevant youth accommodation or children's home in England. Furthermore, in view of the seriousness of the allegations found proved against him, I have decided that Dr Earl Beckles shall not be entitled to apply for restoration of his eligibility to teach.**

**This Order takes effect from the date on which it is served on the Teacher.**

**Dr Earl Beckles has a right of appeal to the Queen's Bench Division of the High Court within 28 days from the date he is given notice of this Order.**

**NAME OF DECISION MAKER: Alan Meyrick**

**Date: 19 June 2012**