



National College for
Teaching & Leadership

Mr Michael Woodhouse: Professional conduct panel outcome

**Panel decision and reasons on behalf of the
Secretary of State for Education**

May 2015

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Professional conduct panel decision and recommendations, and decision on behalf of the Secretary of State

Teacher:	Mr Michael Woodhouse
Teacher ref no:	0152971
Teacher date of birth:	20/09/1977
NCTL case ref no:	11306
Date of determination:	6 May 2015
Former employer:	Hagley Park High School, Rugeley, Staffordshire

A. Introduction

A professional conduct panel (“the panel”) of the National College for Teaching and Leadership (“the National College”) convened on 5 and 6 May 2015 at 53-55 Butts Road, Earlsdon Park, Coventry CV1 3BH to consider the case of Mr Michael Woodhouse.

The panel members were Mr Tony James (teacher panellist – in the chair), Mr Tapan Debnath (lay panellist) and Mrs Fiona Tankard (teacher panellist).

The legal adviser to the panel was Mr Paddy Roche of Blake Morgan LLP Solicitors, Oxford.

The presenting officer for the National College was Mr Christopher Gillespie of Counsel.

Mr Woodhouse 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 26 February 2015 (as amended).

It was alleged that Mr Woodhouse was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute in that:-

1. During 2004/2005 he engaged in an inappropriate relationship with a student/ former student, Pupil A, of Hagley Park High School / Aelfgar Sixth Form College, on various dates unknown he:-
 - a. communicated via MSN with Pupil A outside of School hours,
 - b. exchanged mobile numbers with Pupil A,
 - c. sent Pupil A text messages,
 - d. gave Pupil A a lift/s in his car,
 - e. met with Pupil A outside of school hours,
 - f. sent flowers to Pupil A,
 - g. invited Pupil A into his house,
 - h. allowed Pupil A to stay at his house overnight and/or in his bed,
 - i. kissed Pupil A on one or more occasions,
 - j. engaged in sexual activity with Pupil A, on one or more occasions including:-
 - i. had sexual intercourse with Pupil A on a date unknown before 7 January 2005 when she was still a pupil at Hagley Park High School,
 - ii. had sexual intercourse with Pupil A at his house in [redacted] on a Sunday afternoon on a date unknown but when she was still a pupil at Hagley Park High School on an occasion when Pupil A's father had dropped her at his house,
 - iii. on a date unknown:-
 1. allowed Pupil A to masturbate him in his car,
 2. performed oral sex on Pupil A;

2. Between August and October 2005 sent inappropriate correspondence to Pupil A including:-
 - a. a [redacted],
 - b. a congratulations card,
 - c. handwritten letters in which he included the following words:-
 - i. 'I love you',
 - ii. 'you are the most special person I have ever been with',
 - iii. 'you're so gorgeous and beautiful',
 - iv. 'I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with you'.
 - v. 'I want you so much';
3. His conduct described at paragraphs 1 and 2 above was sexually motivated;
4. He allowed Pupil B and/or Pupil C to stay overnight at his house.

Mr Woodhouse indicated in his Response to the Notice of Proceedings that he did not admit the allegations.

C. Preliminary applications

In the absence of Mr Woodhouse who failed to attend the hearing the presenting officer applied for the case to proceed. The panel was satisfied that the notice of proceedings in proper form had been sent to Mr Woodhouse and noted that he had responded to it by returning the notice of proceedings response form, which he had signed, and dated 16 March 2015.

The panel was satisfied that it had been made clear in the response form that Mr Woodhouse did not intend to appear at the hearing and did not intend to be represented. That indication was confirmed by other correspondence in the case papers particularly a letter from his union representative at page 151. The panel was therefore satisfied that he had effectively waived his right to be present and the panel thus decided that the case should proceed in his absence.

D. Summary of evidence

Documents

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

Section 1	Chronology, Anonymised Pupil List, List of Key People.	Pages 2 - 5.
Section 2	Notice of Proceedings and Response	Pages 7 – 15.
Section 3	National College Witness Statements	Pages 17 – 23.
Section 4	National College Documents	Pages 25 – 72.
	and Police Documents	Pages 74 – 140.
Section 5	Teacher Documents.	Pages 141 – 165.

The panel members confirmed that they had read all of the documents in advance of the hearing.

In addition the panel admitted a letter from Mr Woodhouse's Union representative, dated 23 April 2015, with written submission on behalf of Mr Woodhouse annexed. These additional documents were added to the teacher section of the case papers and numbered pages 166 – 171.

Witnesses

The panel heard oral evidence from:-

1. Pupil A.
2. Parent Z – Pupil A's father.

E. 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 together with the additional documents submitted in the course of the hearing.

The case concerns an allegation that while employed as a teacher of art at Hagley Park High School Mr Woodhouse formed an inappropriate relationship with Pupil A, who was a female student in his class and aged 16. It is alleged that during the course of that relationship Mr Woodhouse kept contact with Pupil A outside of School by MSN and text

messages. He met her on a number of occasions and [redacted]. In the course of the relationship it is alleged that Pupil A stayed at Mr Woodhouse's home and sexual activity took place including full sexual intercourse on more than one occasion. It is further alleged that Mr Woodhouse also allowed two male pupils at the school, [redacted] to stay overnight at his home.

Around April 2005 Mr Woodhouse left Hagley Park High School but the relationship with Pupil A continued for several months thereafter. The case papers contain copies of various communications sent by Mr Woodhouse to Pupil A, in and around August 2005, expressing his feelings for her and indicating that he loved her.

It is specifically alleged by the National College that Mr Woodhouse's conduct towards Pupil A was sexually motivated.

The case papers indicate that Mr Woodhouse accepts many of the specific allegations made against him but asserts that the relationship with Pupil A did not develop until after he had terminated his employment at the school and that he did not engage in sexual activity with her until after he had left the school. He told the police that the relationship lasted for only a few months and that he had sex with her on only two or three occasions. He denies engaging in oral sex with her or acts of masturbation in his car as she alleges.

Findings of fact

Our findings of fact are as follows:-

We have found the following particulars of the allegations against Michael Woodhouse proven, for these reasons:-

1. During 2004/2005 he engaged in an inappropriate relationship with a student/ former student, Pupil A, of Hagley Park High School / Aelfgar Sixth Form College, on various dates unknown that he:-
 - a. communicated via MSN with Pupil A outside of School hours,
 - b. exchanged mobile numbers with Pupil A,
 - c. sent Pupil A text messages,
 - d. gave Pupil A a lift/s in his car,
 - e. met with Pupil A outside of School hours,
 - f. sent flowers to Pupil A,
 - g. invited Pupil A into his house,
 - h. allowed Pupil A to stay at his house overnight and/or in his bed,

- i. kissed Pupil A on one or more occasions,

In relation to all of the above particulars Mr Woodhouse has made admissions in his written submission at page 169 of the case papers and in the draft statement of agreed facts at pages 142 – 146. Those admissions made by Mr Woodhouse accord with allegations made by Pupil A of how he behaved towards her. They also repeat the answers he made when those matters were put to him in the course of his lengthy interview under caution with the Police at Watling House Custody suite on 31 January 2012. These factual particulars are therefore proved on the balance of probabilities. We recognise that Mr Woodhouse asserts in relation to particular h that Pupil A did not stay in his bed until 23/24 July 2005 and our findings in relation to this claim are set out below under particular 1.j.

- j. engaged in sexual activity with Pupil A, on one or more occasions including:-
 - ii. had sexual intercourse with Pupil A at his house in [redacted] on a Sunday afternoon on a date unknown but when she was still a Pupil at Hagley Park High School on an occasion when Pupil A's father had dropped her at his house,
 - iii. on a date unknown:-
 1. allowed Pupil A to masturbate him in his car,
 2. performed oral sex on Pupil A;

Mr Woodhouse denies that he had sexual intercourse with Pupil A until 24/25 July 2005. He further denies that, at any time, he allowed Pupil A to masturbate him in his car or that he ever performed oral sex on Pupil A. His case is that sexual intercourse first took place with Pupil A on 23 July 2005 following an end of term farewell celebration for a member of staff. He says the relationship ended in October 2005. In his Police interview under caution he admitted that he had sex with Pupil A on " 2 or 3 occasions".

Pupil A says that sexual activity with Mr Woodhouse occurred with much greater frequency. She says, that the relationship and first act of intercourse occurred at his home in [redacted] when she was a current pupil at Hagley Park High School and he was a member of staff there. She told the hearing that the relationship continued for 9 to 12 months and that acts of masturbation and oral sex occurred.

There is therefore a significant factual conflict between the accounts given by teacher and pupil covering the duration and intensity of the relationship and the number and nature of sexual acts involved.

During the course of this hearing we were able to view the video of Pupil A's interview with the Police in which she described what had happened. We also heard her give

evidence in person and were able to question her. We were, thus, able to form an impression of her. We found her to be a credible witness who was doing her best to tell the truth. Some of her evidence was corroborated by others especially her father who also gave evidence on oath and Pupil B whose unchallenged written statement was contained in the case papers. We were also helped by the graphic letters which Mr Woodhouse wrote to her in August 2005 expressing his very strong feelings for her.

In short we believed Pupil A.

By contrast Mr Woodhouse chose not to attend the hearing so we did not hear from him, although we have been able to consider his written submissions. However, we cannot ignore the fact that throughout the majority of his lengthy interview under caution with the Police he denied absolutely the existence of any sort of inappropriate relationship with Pupil A at any time. Throughout most of his Police interview Mr Woodhouse told numerous lies in an attempt to conceal the reality of the relationship which developed with Pupil A and which he now, in part at least, admits. However the limited admissions that he made to the interviewing officers, which are repeated in the written submissions to this hearing, were elicited only when the police disclosed to him copies of his emotional and incriminating letters to Pupil A. He was, therefore, left with little alternative but to concede that there had been a relationship between him and a pupil/former pupil ten years his junior. Comparing Mr Woodhouse's account of what had happened between them in 2004/5 we are left in no doubt that we are persuaded that Pupil A, and not the teacher, has told the truth.

Applying that assessment to particular j we find that the following limbs of this particular have been proved: -

- ii. This occasion was described in detail by both Pupil A and her father in their separate accounts to the hearing. Their accounts were consistent. Both described the visit being to Mr Woodhouse's home in [redacted]. Both referred to the purpose of the visit being to allow Mr Woodhouse to view and evaluate Pupil A's art coursework. Both described the visit occurring [redacted]. Pupil A's father mentioned being introduced to a lady he took to be Mr Woodhouse's partner – in itself very significant because it predates Mr Woodhouse being awarded single person discount by the Council with effect from 1 May 2005. Pupil A's father said he thought the visit to Mr Woodhouse's home in [redacted] occurred at about Easter time. All of those details would put the incident of sexual intercourse which Pupil A described fully to the Police at a time when:
 - Pupil A was still engaged with her art coursework
 - Mr Woodhouse was living at [redacted]

- Mr Woodhouse was still involved with his ex-partner (therefore before 1 May 2005)

Thus Mr Woodhouse was still on the staff at Hagley Park.

- iii. 1 and 2 These incidents were described to the Police by Pupil A in very considerable detail in the video we viewed. Mr Woodhouse denies any such conduct happened at all. We believed Pupil A and find it impossible to accept that she simply made up her account which is set out at pages 60 – 61 of the case papers. We are satisfied that these acts as described by Pupil A occurred. As there appears to be no possibility of mistake the only other explanation for her detailed account of them is that the account has been made up by Pupil A and we entirely reject that possibility.

2. Between August and October 2005 sent inappropriate correspondence to Pupil A including:-

- a. a [redacted],
- b. a congratulations card,
- c. handwritten letters in which he included the following words:-
 - i. 'I love you',
 - ii. 'you are the most special person I have ever been with',
 - iii. 'you're so gorgeous and beautiful',
 - iv. 'I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with you'.
 - v. 'I want you so much';

These particulars are all admitted by Mr Woodhouse in his written submission at page 169 of the case papers and in the draft statement of agreed facts at pages 142 – 146. Copies of the [redacted], the congratulations card and the handwritten letters are also exhibited in the case papers and the originals of these documents were also produced by Pupil A to the panel when she gave evidence on oath in the course of the hearing.

3. His conduct described at paragraphs 1 and 2 above were sexually motivated;

It follows, inevitably, from our factual findings in relation to particulars 1 and 2 that we are driven to conclude that Mr Woodhouse's conduct towards Pupil A was sexually motivated. We are satisfied that Mr Woodhouse had sexual intercourse

and other sexual activity with her on more than one occasion and at a time when she was 16 years of age and still on the roll at Hagley Park High School. He accepted in his police interview that he knew [redacted] and that “she had a few problems [redacted]” (page 88) and yet the evidence establishes that he fostered a relationship with her which led to the sexual activity that we have found to be proved on the evidence that we have heard, viewed and read.

4. He allowed Pupil B and/or Pupil C to stay overnight at his house.

This particular is admitted by Mr Woodhouse in the draft statement of agreed facts at page 145 and in his written submission (page 170). He says this occurred only when he was no longer a teacher at these former pupils’ school. It is supported by the unchallenged written witness statement of Pupil B [redacted]. It is further supported by the accounts given by Pupil A in her interview with the Police [redacted]. While there may be an issue over the date that these stays occurred it is clear that this particular is proved on the evidence and we do not consider that the date(s) are material in view of the other more serious matters that we have found proved since no allegation of any sexual impropriety towards the two male pupils is put in this case.

We have found the following particulars of the allegation(s) against Michael Woodhouse not proven, for these reasons:

- j. i. had sexual intercourse with Pupil A on a date unknown before 7 January 2005 when she was still a pupil at Hagley Park High School,

As indicated we found Pupil A to be a credible witness. We were also satisfied from the photograph produced by her father that [redacted] occurred on 7 January 2005. The camera on which the photograph was taken automatically recorded the date of the picture so we were able to pinpoint the date [redacted]. However we were concerned that, although appearing to do her best, Pupil A was uncertain on dates and the exact sequence of events so we did not feel able to rely on her account that the first incident of sexual intercourse with Mr Woodhouse occurred before the date [redacted]. We therefore do not find this part of particular j to have been proved.

Findings as to unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute

In our judgement this is a very serious case involving a gross breach of trust towards a female pupil/former pupil [redacted]. We judge that Pupil A was especially vulnerable and Mr Woodhouse conceded in his caution interview that he was aware that Pupil A had a number of emotional problems. [redacted]

Unacceptable professional conduct is defined as “misconduct of a serious nature falling significantly short of the standard of behaviour expected of a teacher” and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute should be judged in a similar way. In this case we are satisfied that Mr Woodhouse’s conduct towards Pupil A over many months constitutes both unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

He betrayed his duty of care towards her in a flagrant way which took no account of her wellbeing and we are satisfied that she has been very damaged by her experience with Mr Woodhouse. He only finally began to recognise the impact his conduct had on Pupil A in 2012 when he was confronted with the consequences for Pupil A in the course of his police interview.

This case discloses a fundamental and sustained disregard for the Teachers’ Standards and in particular the requirement to treat pupils with dignity and mutual respect. He has shown no regard for Pupil A’s wellbeing and failed to conduct himself in a way that is compliant with the ethos, policies and practices of any school.

Panel’s recommendation to the Secretary of State

As we have made clear we consider that this is a very serious case. The teacher’s behaviour towards Pupil A involves a fundamental disregard for her welfare over many months. His behaviour has been totally incompatible with his remaining as a member of the teaching profession – a fact which he does seem to acknowledge in his written submission to the panel where it is said that “he has been forced to come to terms with the fact that his relatively brief teaching career has ended for good”.

We have carefully considered the written testimonials he has submitted but we cannot identify any mitigation for his behaviour. In addition we judge that his failure to acknowledge in his police interview the nature of his relationship until confronted with the damning evidence of his letters to Pupil A is an aggravating factor in this case. We were left in no doubt after hearing from Pupil A that she has suffered substantial emotional damage as a consequence of the teacher’s involvement with her.

Prohibition orders are made in the public interest which includes:-

- the protection of pupils
- the maintenance of public confidence in the profession
- declaring and upholding proper standards of conduct

We judge that all three considerations are engaged in this case.

We have also looked at the factors which we are advised to take into account in making our recommendation which are set out in the *Teacher Misconduct: The Prohibition of Teachers* guidance.

In this case we consider that the following factors are relevant to Mr Woodhouse's behaviour:-

- serious departure from the personal and professional conduct elements of the Teachers' Standards
- misconduct seriously affecting the wellbeing of pupils
- a deep seated attitude that leads to harmful behaviour
- abuse of a position of trust involving a vulnerable pupil
- sexual misconduct

We judge that Mr Woodhouse has demonstrated by his conduct that he is wholly unfit to remain as a teacher and therefore we recommend that a prohibition order should be imposed in this case. Our concerns about him and our duty to act in the public interest lead us to conclude that it would not be appropriate to allow him, at any time, to apply for set aside of any prohibition order that may be imposed and, thus, that the prohibition order should be for life with no review period.

Decision and reasons on behalf of the Secretary of State

I have given very careful consideration to this case and to the recommendation made by the panel in respect of both sanction and review.

This is a very serious case and the panel has set out above the matters that they have found proven in this case.

This case contains a number of factors that I have taken into account in reaching my judgement about the necessary outcome. The case involves behaviour that is:

- serious departure from the personal and professional conduct elements of the Teachers' Standards
- misconduct seriously affecting the wellbeing of pupils
- a deep seated attitude that leads to harmful behaviour
- abuse of a position of trust involving a vulnerable pupil
- sexual misconduct

I have considered the public interest and the interests of Mr Woodhouse in reaching my judgement in this case. I have also taken into account the need to be proportionate.

This case is a very serious one involving a gross breach of trust towards a female pupil/former pupil who was especially vulnerable, and Mr Woodhouse conceded in his caution interview that he was aware that the pupil had a number of emotional problems.

I have accepted the recommendation of the panel that in this case a prohibition order is appropriate and proportionate and necessary.

I have also considered the panel's recommendation concerning review. For the reasons given I also accept the panel's recommendation. The matters that have been found proven, coupled with the lack of insight mean that I support the panel's recommendation that there should be no review period.

This means that Mr Michael Woodhouse 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 Mr Michael Woodhouse 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.

Mr Michael Woodhouse 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

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Alan Meyrick', with a checkmark at the end.

Date: 8 May 2015

This decision is taken by the decision maker named above on behalf of the Secretary of State.