



Teaching
Regulation
Agency

Mr Sean Aldridge: Professional conduct panel meeting outcome

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

December 2021

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

Teacher:	Mr Sean Aldridge
Teacher ref number:	0547230
Teacher date of birth:	12 April 1982
TRA reference:	16892
Date of determination:	21 December 2021
Former employer:	Warblington School, Havant

Introduction

A professional conduct panel (“the panel”) of the Teaching Regulation Agency (“the TRA”) convened on 21 December 2021 by way of a virtual meeting, to consider the case of Mr Sean Aldridge.

The panel members were Mr Peter Ward (lay panellist – in the chair), Mr Neil Hillman (teacher panellist) and Ms Patricia Hunt (former teacher panellist).

The legal adviser to the panel was Mr Robert Kellaway of Birketts LLP solicitors.

In advance of the meeting, after taking into consideration the public interest and the interests of justice, the TRA agreed to a request from Mr Aldridge that the allegations be considered without a hearing. Mr Aldridge provided a signed statement of agreed facts and admitted conviction of a relevant offence. The panel considered the case at a meeting without the attendance of the presenting officer, Mr Jacob Rickett of Capsticks Solicitors LLP, Mr Aldridge or any representative for Mr Aldridge.

The meeting took place in private by way of a virtual meeting, save for the announcement of the panel’s decision, which was announced in public and recorded.

Allegations

The panel considered the allegations set out in the notice of meeting dated 30 July 2021.

It was alleged that Mr Aldridge was guilty of having been convicted of a relevant offence, in that:

1. On 25 July 2019, he was convicted of the following relevant offences:
 - a. six counts of penetrative sexual activity with a girl under 16;
 - b. one count of sexual activity with a girl under 16 (no penetration);
 - c. seven counts of sexual activity with a girl under 16;
 - d. 10 counts of sexual activity with a girl 13 –17;
 - e. one count of causing/inciting a girl 13 –15 to engage in a penetrative sexual activity.

Mr Aldridge admitted the facts of allegations 1.a to 1.e, and that his behaviour amounted to a conviction of a relevant offence, as set out in the statement of agreed facts signed by Mr Aldridge on 23 October 2021.

The panel noted that the notice of meeting dated 26 November 2021 included allegations which had not previously been referred to in the notice of proceedings dated 30 July 2021, or at the case management hearing on 24 September 2021, or in the statement of agreed facts. Therefore, the panel took no account of, and disregarded, those allegations and only considered the allegations listed 1.a to 1.e as listed above when reaching its decisions.

Preliminary applications

There were no preliminary applications.

The panel noted that since the date of the referral to the TRA in this case, new 'Teacher misconduct: Disciplinary procedures for the teaching profession' were published in May 2020 (the 'May 2020 Procedures'). The panel understands that the earlier provisions contained within the 'Teacher misconduct: disciplinary procedures for the teaching profession' updated in April 2018 (the 'April 2018 Procedures') apply to this case, given that those provisions applied when the referral was made. Although the panel has the power to direct that the May 2020 Procedures should apply in the interests of justice or the public interest, the panel had received no prior representations that this should be the case. For the avoidance of doubt, therefore, the panel confirms that it has applied the April 2018 Procedures in this case.

Summary of evidence

Documents

In advance of the meeting, the panel received a bundle of documents which included:

- Section 1: Chronology and list of key people – pages 3 to 5
- Section 2: Notice of proceedings and response – pages 6 to 16
- Section 3: Statement of agreed facts and presenting officer representations – pages 17 to 21
- Section 4: Teaching Regulation Agency documents – pages 22 to 54

The panel members confirmed that they had read all of the documents within the bundle, in advance of the meeting.

Statement of agreed facts

The panel considered a statement of agreed facts which was signed by Mr Aldridge on 23 October 2021 and signed by the presenting officer on 13 November 2021.

Decision and reasons

The panel announced its decision and reasons as follows:

The panel carefully considered the case and reached a decision.

In advance of the meeting, the TRA agreed to a request from Mr Aldridge for the allegations to be considered without a hearing. The panel had the ability to direct that the case be considered at a hearing if required in the interests of justice or in the public interest. The panel did not determine that such a direction was necessary or appropriate in this case.

Mr Aldridge had been employed as a teacher at Warblington School, Havant ('the School'). Mr Aldridge was arrested on 23 November 2017 in connection with an allegation of sexual activity with pupils whilst he was employed as a teacher at the School.

The case was referred to the National College Teaching & Leadership (a predecessor to the TRA) by Hampshire Constabulary on 1 December 2017.

On 25 July 2019, Mr Aldridge was convicted of numerous offences, and on 29 July 2019 he was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment. Mr Aldridge was also registered on the sex offenders register.

The notice of proceedings dated 30 July 2021 had originally listed the case for a professional conduct panel hearing ('PCPH') on 24 September 2021. Mr Aldridge, in an undated letter, informed the TRA that he considered the PCPH should be postponed as he was in prison and he felt he would not have a fair hearing. In addition, Mr Aldridge considered the PCPH should take place in private. Mr Aldridge stated the notice of proceedings was first placed in his possession on 25 August 2021 having previously been sent to the incorrect prisons.

A case management hearing ('CMH') took place on 24 September 2021. At the start of the CMH, Mr Aldridge informed the panel that he would prefer the case to be dealt with by way of a professional conduct panel meeting ('PCPM') rather than a PCPH. There was no objection from the TRA to the matter being dealt with by way of a PCPM.

Following the CMH, a PCPM was listed to take place on 21 December 2021 and an agreed statement of facts was signed in advance of the PCPM.

Findings of fact

The findings of fact are as follows:

The panel found the following particulars of the allegations against you proved, for these reasons:

- 1. On 25 July 2019, you were convicted of the following relevant offences:**
 - a. six counts of penetrative sexual activity with a girl under 16;**
 - b. one count of sexual activity with a girl under 16 (no penetration);**
 - c. seven counts of sexual activity with a girl under 16;**
 - d. 10 counts of sexual activity with a girl 13 – 17;**
 - e. one count of causing/inciting a girl 13 – 15 to engage in a penetrative sexual activity.**

The panel considered a statement of agreed facts, signed by Mr Aldridge on 23 October 2021. In the statement of agreed facts, Mr Aldridge admitted that on 29 July 2019 he had been convicted at Portsmouth Crown Court of 25 offences and sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment. Several of the offences were multiple incident counts of sexual activity with [REDACTED] girls when they had been pupils at the School over a period of approximately [REDACTED] years.

Mr Aldridge had admitted and accepted that each of the 25 offences:

- i. are relevant criminal offences for the purposes of The Teachers' Disciplinary Regulations 2012;
- ii. relate to an activity involving sexual activity with children;
- iii. are contrary to the standards of personal and professional conduct expected of a teacher, with reference to the Teachers' Standards; and
- iv. would be likely to affect public confidence in the teaching profession if the teacher were allowed to continue teaching.

The panel was provided with a copy of the Certificate of Conviction from Portsmouth Crown Court, which confirmed Mr Aldridge's convictions in respect of the offences referred to at allegations 1.a to 1.e.

The panel noted page 8 of the Teacher Misconduct: The Prohibition of Teachers ('the Advice') which states that where there has been a conviction, at any time, of a criminal offence, the hearing will not re-examine the facts of the case and the panel will accept the conviction as conclusive proof that establishes the relevant fact.

Therefore, on examination of the documents before the panel, the panel was satisfied that the facts of the allegations 1.a to 1.e were proved.

Findings as to a conviction of a relevant offence

Having found the allegations proved, the panel went on to consider whether the facts of those proved allegations amounted to a conviction of a relevant offence.

The panel was satisfied that the conduct of Mr Aldridge, in relation to the facts it found proved, involved clear breaches of the Teachers' Standards. The panel considered that by reference to Part 2, Mr Aldridge was in breach of the following standards:

- Teachers uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school, by
 - Treating pupils with dignity, building relationships rooted in mutual respect, and at all times observing proper boundaries appropriate to a teacher's professional position
 - having regard for the need to safeguard pupils' well-being, in accordance with statutory provisions
 - showing tolerance of and respect for the rights of others

- Teachers must have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach, and maintain high standards in their own attendance and punctuality.
- Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

The panel was satisfied that the conduct of Mr Aldridge was wholly contrary to the standards expected of the teaching profession. Teachers are placed in a privileged position of trust and Mr Aldridge had abused his position. Mr Aldridge's conduct was of the most serious and gravest kind.

Mr Aldridge's actions in committing the offences had undoubtedly caused significant hurt and suffering to pupils who had been placed in his care.

The panel noted that Mr Aldridge's behaviour ultimately led to a sentence of imprisonment, which was indicative of the seriousness of the offences committed.

The panel noted pages 10 and 11 of the Advice, which state that any activity involving sexual activity is likely to be considered a relevant offence.

The panel also found that the seriousness of the offending behaviour that led to the conviction was relevant to Mr Aldridge's ongoing suitability to teach.

The panel also took account of the way the teaching profession is viewed by others. The panel considered that Mr Aldridge's behaviour in committing the offences would affect public confidence in the teaching profession. Further, that public confidence in the profession would be severely damaged in the event he was allowed to teach following his release from prison.

In summary, the panel found the allegations proven and that Mr Aldridge had been convicted of a relevant offence.

Panel's recommendation to the Secretary of State

Given the panel's findings in respect of a conviction of a relevant offence, it was necessary for the panel to go on to consider whether it would be appropriate to recommend the imposition of a prohibition order by the Secretary of State.

In considering whether to recommend to the Secretary of State that a prohibition order should be made, the panel had to consider whether it would be an appropriate and proportionate measure, and whether it would be in the public interest to do so. Prohibition orders should not be given in order to be punitive, or to show that blame has been apportioned, although they are likely to have punitive effect.

The panel had regard to the particular public interest considerations set out in the Advice and, having done so, found them to be relevant in this case: the protection of pupils; the protection of other members of the public; the maintenance of public confidence in the profession and declaring and upholding proper standards of conduct.

In the light of the panel's findings against Mr Aldridge which involved 25 counts of sexual activity with pupils, there was a very strong public interest consideration in respect of the protection of pupils given the serious and multiple findings of sexual activity with pupils.

Similarly, the panel considered that public confidence in the profession would be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Mr Aldridge were not treated with the utmost seriousness when regulating the conduct of the profession.

The panel decided that a strong public interest consideration in declaring proper standards of conduct in the profession was also present as the conduct found against Mr Aldridge was outside that which could reasonably be tolerated.

There was no evidence before the panel that there was a substantial or significant public interest consideration in retaining Mr Aldridge within the profession. The panel was provided with no evidence that Mr Aldridge had made, or could make in the future, a substantial contribution to the teaching profession.

Notwithstanding the clear public interest considerations that were present, the panel considered carefully whether or not it would be proportionate to impose a prohibition order, taking into account the effect that this would have on Mr Aldridge.

In carrying out the balancing exercise, the panel had regard to the public interest considerations as well as the interests of Mr Aldridge. The panel took further account of the Advice, which suggests that a prohibition order may be appropriate if certain behaviours of a teacher have been proved. In the list of such behaviours, those that are relevant in this case are:

- serious departure from the personal and professional conduct elements of the Teachers' Standards;
- misconduct seriously affecting the education and/or well-being of pupils, and particularly where there is a continuing risk;
- abuse of position or trust (particularly involving vulnerable pupils) or violation of the rights of pupils;
- sustained or serious bullying, or other deliberate behaviour that undermines pupils, the profession, the school or colleagues;

- sexual misconduct, for example, involving actions that were sexually motivated or of a sexual nature and/or that use or exploit the trust, knowledge or influence derived from the individual's professional position;
- the commission of a serious criminal offence, including those that resulted in a conviction or caution, paying particular attention to offences that are 'relevant matters' for the purposes of The Police Act 1997 and criminal record disclosures.

Even though the behaviour found proved in this case indicated that a prohibition order would be appropriate, the panel went on to consider the mitigating factors. Mitigating factors may indicate that a prohibition order would not be appropriate or proportionate.

The panel considered that Mr Aldridge's actions had been calculated and deliberate.

Mr Aldridge was not acting under duress at the time he committed the relevant offences.

No documents in the form of mitigation were submitted on behalf of Mr Aldridge. There was no indication from the documents before the panel that Mr Aldridge was remorseful or had shown insight into his conduct.

The panel first considered whether it would be proportionate to conclude this case with no recommendation of prohibition, considering whether the publication of the findings made by the panel would be sufficient.

The panel was of the view that, applying the standard of the ordinary intelligent citizen, it would not be a proportionate and appropriate response to recommend no prohibition order. Recommending that the publication of adverse findings was sufficient would unacceptably compromise the public interest considerations present in this case, despite the severity of the consequences for Mr Aldridge of prohibition.

The panel was of the view that prohibition was both proportionate and appropriate. The panel decided that the public interest considerations significantly outweighed the interests of Mr Aldridge. The fact that Mr Aldridge had been convicted of such serious sexual offences which were at the most serious end of the spectrum was a significant factor in forming that opinion

Accordingly, the panel made a recommendation to the Secretary of State that a prohibition order should be imposed with immediate effect.

The panel went on to consider whether or not it would be appropriate to recommend that a review period of the order should be considered. The panel was mindful that the Advice states that a prohibition order applies for life, but there may be circumstances, in any given case, that may make it appropriate to allow a teacher to apply to have the prohibition order reviewed after a specified period of time that may not be less than 2 years.

The Advice indicates that there are behaviours that, if proved, would militate against the recommendation of a review period. The panel considered that the following behaviour was relevant in respect of Mr Aldridge, serious sexual misconduct, e.g. where the act was sexually motivated and resulted in, or had the potential to result in, harm to a person or persons, particularly where the individual has used their professional position to influence or exploit a person or persons. Mr Aldridge had been found guilty of 25 counts of sexual activity or causing/inciting girls across ages 13 to 17 to engage in sexual activity. The panel was in no doubt that Mr Aldridge's misconduct was of the most serious kind and had been serious sexual misconduct.

The panel decided that the findings indicated a situation in which a review period would not be appropriate and, as such, decided that it would be proportionate in all the circumstances for the prohibition order to be recommended without provision for a 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 of the panel in respect of both sanction and review period.

In considering this case, I have also given very careful attention to the Advice that the Secretary of State has published concerning the prohibition of teachers.

In this case, the panel has found all of the allegations proven and found that those proven facts amount to relevant convictions.

The panel has made a recommendation to the Secretary of State that Mr Sean Aldridge should be the subject of a prohibition order, with no provision for a review period.

In particular, the panel has found that Mr Aldridge is in breach of the following standards:

- Teachers uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school, by
 - Treating pupils with dignity, building relationships rooted in mutual respect, and at all times observing proper boundaries appropriate to a teacher's professional position
 - having regard for the need to safeguard pupils' well-being, in accordance with statutory provisions
 - showing tolerance of and respect for the rights of others
- Teachers must have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach, and maintain high standards in their own attendance and punctuality.

- Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

The panel was also, “satisfied that the conduct of Mr Aldridge was wholly contrary to the standards expected of the teaching profession. Teachers are placed in a privileged position of trust and Mr Aldridge had abused his position. Mr Aldridge’s conduct was of the most serious and gravest kind.”

The findings of misconduct are particularly serious as they include a finding of serious sexual misconduct and sexual activity with children.

I have to determine whether the imposition of a prohibition order is proportionate and in the public interest. In considering that for this case, I have considered the overall aim of a prohibition order which is to protect pupils and to maintain public confidence in the profession. I have considered the extent to which a prohibition order in this case would achieve that aim taking into account the impact that it will have on the individual teacher. I have also asked myself, whether a less intrusive measure, such as the published finding of a relevant conviction, would itself be sufficient to achieve the overall aim. I have to consider whether the consequences of such a publication are themselves sufficient. I have considered therefore whether or not prohibiting Mr Aldridge, and the impact that will have on him, is proportionate and in the public interest.

In this case, I have considered the extent to which a prohibition order would protect children. The panel has observed, “In the light of the panel’s findings against Mr Aldridge which involved 25 counts of sexual activity with pupils, there was a very strong public interest consideration in respect of the protection of pupils given the serious and multiple findings of sexual activity with pupils.”

A prohibition order would therefore prevent such a risk from being present in the future. I have also taken into account the panel’s comments on insight and remorse, which the panel sets out as follows, “There was no indication from the documents before the panel that Mr Aldridge was remorseful or had shown insight into his conduct.”

In my judgement, the lack of insight means that there is some risk of the repetition of this behaviour and this puts at risk the future well-being of pupils. I have therefore given this element considerable weight in reaching my decision.

I have gone on to consider the extent to which a prohibition order would maintain public confidence in the profession. The panel observe, “The panel considered that Mr Aldridge’s behaviour in committing the offences would affect public confidence in the teaching profession. Further, that public confidence in the profession would be severely damaged in the event he was allowed to teach following his release from prison.”

I am particularly mindful of the finding of sexual misconduct with children in this case and the impact that such a finding has on the reputation of the profession.

I have had to consider that the public has a high expectation of professional standards of all teachers and that the public might regard a failure to impose a prohibition order as a failure to uphold those high standards. In weighing these considerations, I have had to consider the matter from the point of view of an “ordinary intelligent and well-informed citizen.”

I have considered whether the publication of a finding of unacceptable professional conduct, in the absence of a prohibition order, can itself be regarded by such a person as being a proportionate response to the misconduct that has been found proven in this case.

I have also considered the impact of a prohibition order on Mr Aldridge himself. The panel comment, “The panel was provided with no evidence that Mr Aldridge had made, or could make in the future, a substantial contribution to the teaching profession.”

A prohibition order would prevent Mr Aldridge from teaching and would also clearly deprive the public of his contribution to the profession for the period that it is in force.

In this case, I have placed considerable weight on the panel’s comments concerning the lack of insight or remorse. The panel has also said, “Mr Aldridge had been found guilty of 25 counts of sexual activity or causing/inciting girls across ages 13 to 17 to engage in sexual activity. The panel was in no doubt that Mr Aldridge’s misconduct was of the most serious kind and had been serious sexual misconduct.”

I have given less weight in my consideration of sanction therefore, to the contribution that Mr Aldridge has made to the profession. In my view, it is necessary to impose a prohibition order in order to maintain public confidence in the profession. A published decision, in light of the circumstances in this case, that is not backed up by remorse or insight, does not in my view satisfy the public interest requirement concerning public confidence in the profession.

For all of these reasons, I have concluded that a prohibition order is proportionate and in the public interest in order to achieve the intended aims of a prohibition order.

I have gone on to consider the matter of a review period. In this case, the panel has recommended that no provision should be made for a review period.

I have considered the panel’s comments “Mr Aldridge had been convicted of such serious sexual offences which were at the most serious end of the spectrum”.

I have considered whether allowing for a no review period reflects the seriousness of the findings and is proportionate and necessary to achieve the aim of maintaining public confidence in the profession. In this case, the factors which mean that a no review is necessary and proportionate and in the public interest are the serious nature of the sexual misconduct and the lack of either insight or remorse.

I consider therefore that allowing for no review period is necessary to maintain public confidence and is proportionate and in the public interest.

This means that Mr Sean Aldridge 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 Sean Aldridge 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 Sean Aldridge 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.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan Meyrick', with a vertical line at the end.

Decision maker: Alan Meyrick

Date: 22 December 2021

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