



Teaching
Regulation
Agency

Mr James Wooldridge: Professional conduct panel outcome

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

October 2022

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

Teacher:	Mr James Wooldridge
Teacher ref number:	8844550
Teacher date of birth:	20 October 1966
TRA reference:	18785
Date of determination:	24 October 2022
Former employer:	Eastbourne College, East Sussex

Introduction

A professional conduct panel (“the panel”) of the Teaching Regulation Agency (“the TRA”) convened virtually on 20 September 2022 to 26 September 2022, to consider the case of Mr James Wooldridge (“Mr Wooldridge”). The panel reconvened the virtual hearing on 20 October 2022 and 24 October 2022 to conclude the case of Mr Wooldridge.

The panel members were Ms Jo Palmer-Tweed (teacher panellist – in the chair), Mr Maurice McBride (lay panellist) and Mr Alan Wells (former teacher panellist).

The legal adviser to the panel was Miss Carly Hagedorn of Eversheds Sutherland (International) LLP solicitors.

The presenting officer for the TRA was Miss Kiera Riddy of Browne Jacobson LLP.

Mr Wooldridge was present and was represented by Ms Althea Brown of Counsel.

The hearing took place in public and was recorded.

Allegations

The panel considered the allegations set out in the Notice of Proceedings dated 16 May 2022.

It was alleged that Mr Wooldridge was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, in that whilst employed as a teacher at the Eastbourne College between 1 April 2018 to 20 September 2019:

- 1) He failed to maintain appropriate boundaries and/or engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil A in that he:
 - a. exchanged text messages with her from approximately November 2010;
 - b. encouraged and/or instructed her to save his contact details in her phone under a different name;
 - c. engaged in one or more conversations of a sexual nature with her during the 2011/12 academic year and/or asked her:
 - i. about the extent of her sexual experience in or around September 2011;
 - ii. what age was too old for her in the context of relationships and/or sexual activity in or around September 2011;
 - d. visited and/or met with her 1:1 in her boarding room at the school on one or more occasions during the 2011/12 academic year;
 - e. on or around 2 February 2012:
 - i. invited Pupil A to his home;
 - ii. drove pupil A to his home;
 - iii. instructed Pupil A to duck down in his car to avoid being seen;
 - iv. gave pupil a tour of home and/or took her upstairs;
 - v. discussed and/or showed images of her on a computer at his home;
 - vi. drove her back to school;
 - vii. held her hand in his car;
 - viii. instructed her not to tell anyone about the events of that day;
 - f. on or around 6 February 2012 invited Pupil A to attend a family skiing holiday with him;
 - g. gave and/or received one or more gifts or items with Pupil A, in particular:
 - i. gave her a cupcake with the personalised message 'cricket 118' on or around Valentine's Day 2012;
 - ii. received a letter from her in or around March 2012;
 - iii. lent her The Notebook (a DVD) in or around April 2012;

- iv. received cufflinks from her with the personalised message 'cricket' and '118' in or around June 2012;
 - h. Met her 1:1 for coffee in the local town in or around February 2012;
 - i. Gave her his new mobile number on or around 28 June 2012;
 - j. Met her 1:1 for coffee in the local town on results day on or around 20 August 2012;
 - k. Engaged in an intimate and/or sexual relationship with her following her departure from the school, in particular he:
 - i. kissed her on or around 17 September 2012;
 - ii. discussed feelings of love with her in or around January 2013;
 - iii. discussed sexual activity with her in or around March 2013;
 - iv. met her 1:1 at a hotel in or around March 2013;
 - v. engaged in physical / sexual contact with her on or around 8 April 2013 at his home;
 - vi. engaged in intercourse with her in or around May 2013;
- 2) Failed to follow management warnings and/or instructions and/or demonstrate insight into previous concerns in respect of your conduct towards Pupil A, in particular:
- a. his conduct in texting her at 1(a) continued after:
 - i. a meeting on 6 December 2010 at which he agreed not to text her;
 - ii. a letter dated 21 June 2011 instructing him not to text pupils without specific permission to do so;
 - iii. himself submitting a written document to the school in February 2012 in which he undertook never to text Pupil A's phone;
 - b. his conduct in giving her his mobile number at 1(i) was after:
 - i. a letter dated 21 June 2011 stating that giving pupils personal contact details was contrary to the school's policy on safer working practice;
 - ii. a Final Written Warning dated 6 March 2012 instructing him to cease all contact with Pupil A and/or to change his mobile number as a measure to prevent contact with Pupil A;
 - c. His conduct as may be found proven at 1g(ii)-(iv) and/or and/or 1(i)-(k) was after:
 - i. submitting a written document to the school in or around February 2012 in which he promised not to have any further contact with Pupil A;
 - ii. receiving a Final Written Warning dated 6 March 2012 and effective until on or around 26 February 2014 stating that all communication with pupil A other than everyday courtesies must cease;
 - d. He failed to report 1(g)(ii) and/or 1(g)(iv) and/or 1(i)-(k) after:

- i. submitting a written document to the school in or around February 2012 in which he indicated that he would immediately report any attempted contact from Pupil A;
 - ii. receiving a Final Written Warning dated 6 March 2012 and effective until on or around 26 February 2014 stating that he was required to report any attempted contact from Pupil A;
- 3) Provided misleading and/or inaccurate to the school in or around February 2012 as part of their investigation into his conduct towards Pupil A in that he:
- a. stated that his text communication with Pupil A had been limited to 6 messages and/or the preceding 3 weeks in time and/or the topic of her invitation to his family skiing holiday when this was not in fact the case;
 - b. stated that he had decided to delete Pupil A from his phone yourself when in fact he had deleted his messages with her as a result of her informing him to do so;
- 4) His conduct as may be found proven as Allegations 1-2 was sexually motivated.
- 5) His conduct as may be found proven at Allegations 1(b) and/or 1(e)(iii) and/or 1(e)(viii) and/or 3(a)-(b) was dishonest and/or lacked integrity.

Mr Wooldridge admitted to the facts of allegations 1(a), 1(d), 1(e)(i), 1(e)(ii), 1(e)(iv) (in respect of the tour around his home only, and not upstairs), 1(e)(v), 1(e)(vi), 1(f), 1(g)(i), 1(g)(ii), 1(g)(iii), 1(g)(iv), 1(h), 1(i), 1(j), 1(k)(ii), 1(k)(v) (only in respect of physical contact, not sexual), 1(k)(vi), 2(a)(i), 2(a)(ii), 2(c)(i), 2(c)(ii), 2(d)(i), 2(d)(ii) and 4 (in respect of allegation 1(k)(vi)) only and not in respect of any of the other allegations).

Mr Wooldridge denied the facts of allegations 1(b), 1(c)(i), 1(c)(ii), 1(e)(iii), 1(e)(vii), 1(e)(viii), 1(k)(i), 1(k)(iii), 1(k)(iv), 2(a)(iii), 2(b)(i), 2(b)(ii), 3(a), 3(b) and 5.

Mr Wooldridge denied that his conduct in the admitted allegations amounted to unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

Preliminary applications

Excluding the Public

The panel considered whether to exercise its discretion under paragraph 11 of the Teachers' Disciplinary (England) Regulations 2012 (the "Regulations") and paragraph 4.57 of the Teacher Misconduct: Disciplinary Procedures for the Teaching Profession (the "Procedures") to exclude the public from part of the hearing. This followed a request by the teacher's representative that part of the hearing relating to the teacher's sexual conduct and his health should be heard in private.

Teacher's health

The panel determined to exercise its discretion under paragraph 11(3)(b) of the Regulations and the second bullet point of paragraph 4.57 of the Procedures that the public should be excluded from part of the hearing, solely with reference to the teacher's health.

The panel took into account the general rule that hearings should be held in public and that this is desirable to maintain public confidence in the administration of these proceedings and also to maintain confidence in the teaching profession. On this occasion, however, the panel considered that the request for matters relating to the health of the teacher should be heard in private is a reasonable one, given concerns about confidential matters relating to the teacher's health being placed in the public domain.

The panel considered whether that there were any steps short of excluding the public that would serve the purpose of protecting the confidentiality of matters relating to the teacher's health. The panel did not consider there were any steps in this case.

Although there was little reference to the teacher's health in the papers, the panel took into account the submissions by the teacher's representative as to why matters relating to the teacher's health should be excluded from the hearing.

The panel had regard to whether the teacher's request runs contrary to the public interest. The panel is required to announce its decisions in public as to whether the facts have been proven and whether those facts amount to unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute. In the event that the case continues any decision made by the Secretary of State will also be in public. The panel considered that in the circumstances of this case, the public interest will be satisfied by these public announcements. These public announcements will ensure that public confidence in these proceedings and in the standards of the profession are maintained.

Sexual conduct

The panel determined not to exercise its discretion under paragraph 11(3)(b) of "the Regulations" and the second bullet point of paragraph 4.57 of "the Procedures" that the public should be excluded from part of the hearing relating to the teacher's sexual conduct.

The panel took into account the general rule that hearings should be held in public and that this is desirable to maintain public confidence in the administration of these proceedings and also to maintain confidence in the teaching profession.

The panel noted that a great deal of the allegations related to the teacher's sexual conduct and there was no valid reason for the sexual conduct of the teacher to be excluded from the public. The panel noted that the teacher needed to accept the embarrassment and damage to his reputation which is inherent in being involved in a professional conduct process.

The panel also noted that information of an intimate nature may arise relating to third parties. Should it be necessary for such information to be referred to in the course of this hearing, the panel will consider at that time, whether the public should be excluded from the hearing, or whether it would sufficiently protect the interests of third parties to grant anonymity to those third parties without the need to exclude the public from the hearing.

Additional Documents

The teacher's representative applied to admit the witness statement of the teacher and a response document to the Notice of Proceedings. Those documents were not served in accordance with the requirements of paragraph 4.20 of the Procedures, and as such the

panel was required to decide whether those documents should be admitted under paragraph 4.25 of the Procedures. The panel noted that the presenting officer did not object to the contents of the documents, but did bring the late service of the documents to the panel's attention.

Under paragraph 4.18 of the Procedures, the panel may admit any evidence, where it is fair to do so, which may reasonably be considered to be relevant to the case.

The panel was satisfied that the documents were relevant to the case as the witness statement provided the panel with a detailed account of the teacher's response to each allegation. Similarly, the response document to the Notice of Proceedings, provided the panel with a succinct response as to whether the teacher admitted or denied the allegations. The teacher was in attendance and was going to be called to give evidence at the hearing.

With regard to the overall question of fairness, the panel noted that whilst the documents should have been provided at the earliest opportunity, the panel considered that the documents were relevant and the presenting officer would have the opportunity to cross-examine the teacher when he is called to give evidence.

By reason of the above, the panel decided to admit each of the documents and these should be paginated as follows:

Witness statement of James Wooldridge: pages 1144 to 1171

Response document to Notice of Proceedings 1172 to 1174

The panel also requested and received an anonymised pupil list.

Amendment to allegation

An application was made by the presenting officer to amend the Notice of Proceedings by amending the stem of allegation 3 to include the word 'information' after the words 'provided misleading and/or inaccurate'. The panel has the power, in the interests of justice, to amend an allegation or the particulars of an allegation, at any stage before making its decision about whether the facts of the case have been proved.

Before making an amendment, the panel is required to consider any representations by the presenting officer and by the teacher, and the parties were afforded that opportunity. The teacher's representative consented to the application.

The panel considered that the amendment proposed, being a correction of a typographical error, did not change the nature, scope or seriousness of the allegation. There was no prospect of the teacher's case being presented differently had the amendment been made at an earlier stage, and therefore no unfairness or prejudice was caused to the teacher. The panel therefore decided to amend the allegation as proposed. The stem of allegation 3 was amended as follows:

"Provided misleading and/or inaccurate information to the school in or around February 2012 as part of their investigation into your conduct towards Pupil A in that you."

Applications during the course of the hearing

Additional documents

Correspondence dated 5 March 2017

During the course of the hearing, the presenting officer applied to admit email correspondence dated 5 March 2017 between the teacher and Pupil A. The document was not served in accordance with the requirements of paragraph 4.20 of the Procedures, and as such the panel was required to decide whether this document should be admitted under paragraph 4.25 of the Procedures at the discretion of the panel. The email correspondence was referred to by Pupil A, whilst being questioned by a panel member. The panel noted that the teacher's representative did not object to the contents of the document being admitted.

Under paragraph 4.18 of the Procedures, the panel may admit any evidence, where it is fair to do so, which may reasonably be considered to be relevant to the case.

The panel was satisfied that the document was relevant to the case as it was relevant to the panellist's question to Pupil A, and potentially went to Pupil A's credibility.

With regard to the overall question of fairness, the panel noted that the document should have been provided at the earliest opportunity. The panel accepted the presenting officer's reasoning as to why it was not initially included as part of the bundle, due to it not being considered relevant to the specific allegations. The panel noted that the presenting officer and teacher's representative would also have the opportunity to question Pupil A on the contents of the email correspondence.

By reason of the above, the panel decided to admit the document and it was paginated as follows:

Email correspondence dated 5 March 2017: pages 1175 to 1177.

Images of cards from Pupil A to Mr Wooldridge

During the course of the hearing, the teacher's representative applied to admit a word document, with images of two handwritten cards from Pupil A to Mr Wooldridge to rebut the assertion by Pupil A, in her oral evidence, that her relationship with Mr Wooldridge was controlling and/or abusive. The cards were undated. Mr Wooldridge stated that he thought that the first card was sent to him in December 2014 and he thought that the second card was sent to him in October 2016. The document was not served in accordance with the requirements of paragraph 4.20 of the Procedures, and as such the panel was required to decide whether this document should be admitted under paragraph 4.25 of the Procedures.

The panel took into account the objection raised by the presenting officer, in that the handwritten content within the cards was not relevant to any of the specific allegations, and the alleged timing of Pupil A sending the cards in December 2014 and October 2016, was also not relevant to the timeframe of the allegations in question.

Under paragraph 4.18 of the Procedures, the panel may admit any evidence, where it is fair to do so, which may reasonably be considered to be relevant to the case.

The panel was not satisfied that the content within the handwritten cards could reasonably be considered to be relevant to the case as they did not address the specific allegations or provide any information which may be considered to be potentially relevant when considering the timeframe of the allegations. Since the documents did not meet the threshold of relevancy, it was unnecessary for the panel to consider the question of fairness.

Summary of evidence

Documents

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

Section 1: Preliminary Documents – page 9

Section 2: Notice of proceedings and response – pages 11 to 21

Section 3: Teaching Regulation Agency witness statements – pages 23 to 50

Section 4: Teaching Regulation Agency documents – pages 52 to 1018

Section 5: Teacher documents – pages 1021 to 1143

In addition, the panel agreed to accept the following:

Witness statement of James Wooldridge: pages 1144 to 1171

Response document to Notice of Proceedings 1172 to 1174

Email Correspondence dated 5 March 2017: pages 1175 to 1177.

The panel members confirmed that they had read all of the documents within the bundle, in advance of the hearing and the additional documents that the panel decided to admit.

Witnesses

The panel heard oral evidence from the following witnesses who were called on behalf of the TRA:

1. Pupil A – [REDACTED]
2. Witness A – [REDACTED]
3. Witness B – [REDACTED]
4. Witness C – [REDACTED]

Mr Wooldridge gave oral evidence at the hearing.

Decision and reasons

The panel carefully considered the case before it and reached a decision.

Mr Wooldridge was employed at Eastbourne College (“the School”) in September 1989. He was first employed as Housemaster until 31 August 2010 and was also employed as Head of Mathematics from 1 April 2008 until his resignation date of 20 September 2019.

From September 2010, Mr Wooldridge received a range of professional advice from senior staff with regard to his behaviour towards female pupils. The type of alleged behaviour included, but was not limited to, talking to female pupils in their rooms in the boarding house, taking Pupil A home in his car alone after Pupil A arrived drunk at his house, exchanging text messages with Pupil A, taking Pupil A to his home, inviting Pupil A on a skiing holiday with his family and arranging to meet Pupil A in town for coffee. A formal warning was issued as a result of the disciplinary hearing held in March 2012.

On 6 May 2019, Pupil A (who was now a former pupil) handed a letter to the Headmaster of the School which stated that she felt that she had been manipulated by Mr Wooldridge and hadn't felt able to speak out before. The letter from former Pupil A claimed that she was groomed by Mr Wooldridge for the purpose of a sexual relationship after the age of 18.

The Headmaster referred the letter to the LADO on 6 May 2019. Mr Wooldridge was suspended on 18 June 2019 following the LADO's advice. They commenced an internal investigation, based on the new evidence provided in former Pupil A's letter. The School wrote to Mr Wooldridge on 19 August 2019 requiring Mr Wooldridge to attend a disciplinary hearing on 12 September 2019. Mr Wooldridge attended the disciplinary hearing with a union representative. On 16 September 2019, before being informed of the outcome from the disciplinary hearing, Mr Wooldridge resigned. The Headmaster accepted Mr Wooldridge's resignation on 17 September 2019.

Findings of fact

The panel noted that the allegations were in relation to events that took place a considerable time ago. The findings of fact are as follows:

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

1. You failed to maintain appropriate boundaries and/or engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil A in that you:

a. exchanged text messages with her from approximately November 2010;

Mr Wooldridge admitted this allegation. He stated that *“I did send a small number of texts to Pupil A. In November 2010 I responded to an unknown sender which turned out to be her.”*

Pupil A stated that she took his number from Pupil C's phone and sent the first text message to Mr Wooldridge, to which Mr Wooldridge responded and the texting *‘got more regular.’*

The panel noted that the very essence of texting a pupil on an informal basis was a failure by Mr Wooldridge to maintain appropriate boundaries, which was the start of an inappropriate teacher-pupil relationship with Pupil A.

The panel found allegation 1(a) proved.

d. visited and/or met with her 1:1 in her boarding room at the school on one or more occasions during the 2011/12 academic year;

Mr Wooldridge admitted this allegation. He stated *“I did not visit Pupil A deliberately, though I did on one or two occasions talk with her in the doorway to her room and once sat inside.”*

Pupil A stated that Mr Wooldridge did visit her whilst she was alone in her boarding room. Pupil A described a particular time when Mr Wooldridge had visited her, when she had just come out of the shower and answered the door in a towel. Pupil A said that Mr Wooldridge asked if he should leave, but she said no and he came into her room. Pupil A also described another occasion when she had sent a text message to Mr Wooldridge to wish him a happy birthday and he came to her room to thank her for the text message.

The panel noted that the very nature of visiting a pupil on an informal basis in her boarding room was a failure by Mr Wooldridge to maintain appropriate boundaries. The panel further noted that this was the start of an inappropriate teacher-pupil relationship with Pupil A.

The panel found allegation 1(d) proved.

e. on or around 2 February 2012:

i. invited Pupil A to your home;

Mr Wooldridge admitted this allegation. He said *“I did take Pupil A to our home on that date. Pupil A visiting our home on the occasion offered, as detailed in the investigation in 2012, an opportunity to meet my wife as a prelude to possibly joining us on a family skiing holiday as she was a friend of [REDACTED].”*

Pupil A stated that *“on 2 February 2012, I went rowing and capsized so returned home early. I had a quick shower and sent Mr Wooldridge a text afterwards and asked if he was still up for the coffee. He came to collect me from [REDACTED] and took me to his house.”*

The panel noted that inviting Pupil A to his home was a failure by Mr Wooldridge to maintain appropriate boundaries.

The panel found allegation 1(e)(i) proved.

ii. drove pupil A to your home;

Mr Wooldridge admitted this allegation. He stated that *“the lift referred to was when I expected my wife to be home so they could have met prior to inviting her to join the ski trip.”... “Indeed the staff handbook from 2012-13 (the year after this incident) simply advises caution when transporting pupils by car, implying/indicating that it was nevertheless acceptable practice.”*

Pupil A stated that *“on 2 February 2012, I went rowing and capsized so returned home early. I had a quick shower and sent Mr Wooldridge a text afterwards and asked if he was still up for the coffee. He came to collect me from [REDACTED] and took me to his house.”*

The panel noted that driving Pupil A to his home was a failure by Mr Wooldridge to maintain appropriate boundaries.

The panel found allegation 1(e)(ii) proved.

iv. gave pupil a tour of home and/or took her upstairs;

Mr Wooldridge admitted that he gave Pupil A a tour of his house, but stated that he did not show Pupil A upstairs. Mr Wooldridge stated *“I showed Pupil A around the house and the changes we had made with the extension, as I did with any guest. I am sure I didn’t show her upstairs: that was a detail suddenly proposed during interview in 2019 and I said I may have but, if I did, I would only have shown her [REDACTED] room (part of the extension).”*

Mr Wooldridge said that Pupil A has been to his house *“on 9 April 2013, long after she left school.”*

Pupil A stated that Mr Wooldridge took her *“into all of the rooms”*. Pupil A described a bedroom upstairs as having a *“double bed, wardrobe and bigger than usual windows that you would find in a bedroom.”*

The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge’s conduct failed to maintain appropriate boundaries.

On the balance of probabilities, the panel found allegation 1(e)(iv) proved.

v. discussed and/or showed images of her on a computer at your home;

Mr Wooldridge said *“Our computer at home was a family one – our children didn’t have their own – and they uploaded their photos to it. I used it for work, which involved many photos of school events that I used for house newsletters, sports reports, concert reviews etc., in accordance with the practices at that time. As such, there would almost certainly have been photos of Pupil A among hundreds of other pupils, particularly as she was a friend of [REDACTED]. Because Pupil A has been to our home since leaving school, I have little if any recollection of sharing any of this with her then; if I did, it would again just have been as an opportunity of making her feel at home in our family environment prior to the potential ski trip.”*

Pupil A stated *“he then took me to his computer and admitted that he had been on my Facebook page and had downloaded photos of me into an album. He also had school photographs of me from the school dinner.”*

The panel noted Mr Wooldridge’s conduct failed to maintain appropriate boundaries.

The panel found allegation 1(e)(v) proved.

vi. drove her back to school;

Mr Wooldridge admitted this allegation. He said *“I obviously had to drive Pupil A back.”*

Pupil A stated that Mr Wooldridge drove her to the boarding house from his house.

The panel noted Mr Wooldridge’s conduct failed to maintain appropriate boundaries.

The panel found allegation 1(e)(vi) proved.

viii. instructed her not to tell anyone about the events of that day;

Mr Wooldridge denied this allegation. He said that he *“did not instruct Pupil A as stated.”*

Pupil A stated *“he said in the car that I should not tell anyone about my visit to his house. Once I was back home, and at some point, that afternoon, he sent me a message asking if I was feeling warmer and made me promise not to tell anyone about what happened that day. I believe he had said along the line of “this goes without saying but don’t tell anyone about this” I responded and said “yes” and he responded, “no but do you promise...it’s not worth the hassle.”*

The panel noted that there was some evidence that Mr Wooldridge had told Pupil A not to tell anyone about the events that took place after Pupil A had left school. The panel noted that it was more likely than not that Mr Wooldridge would have told Pupil A not to tell anybody about this visit to his house, as there were greater risks and consequences for him if somebody did find out, given that Pupil A was still a pupil at the School.

The panel noted Mr Wooldridge’s conduct failed to maintain appropriate boundaries.

On the balance of probabilities, the panel found allegation 1(e)(viii) proved.

f. on or around 6 February 2012 invited Pupil A to attend a family skiing holiday with you;

Mr Wooldridge denied this allegation. Mr Wooldridge said *“This was an invite from [REDACTED]”*.

Pupil A stated *“on 6 February 2012 Mr Wooldridge invited me to his family skiing holiday whilst I was in his classroom and it was discussed over subsequent days.*

The panel heard evidence from Witness B during the course of the hearing, who stated that she had *“never seen Pupil A hanging around with Pupil C”* ([REDACTED]). Witness B also stated that *“it seemed odd that he had asked her on a ski trip.”*

The panel found the evidence of Pupil A and Witness B to be more credible.

The panel noted Mr Wooldridge’s conduct failed to maintain appropriate boundaries.

The panel found allegation 1(f) proved.

g. gave and/or received one or more gifts or items with Pupil A, in particular:

i. gave her a cupcake with the personalised message ‘cricket 118’ on or around Valentine’s Day 2012;

Mr Wooldridge admitted this allegation. He said that he *“gave Pupil A a cupcake to thank her for helping us, and I mentioned it to her housemistress when I delivered it.”*

Pupil A stated *“on 13 February 2012, the School were delivering valentines cupcakes around the School. After I went home from my lessons at break, I saw a cupcake on my*

desk in my room. It was wrapped in love hearts and read 'cricket 118'. I believe this code was created during a visit to my room as I was trying to think of a suitable password."

Pupil A stated that the cupcake was not a standard school cupcake and described it as a *"fancy, lovey-dovey cupcake"*. The panel noted that the cupcake sticker with message 'cricket 118' had been placed in Pupil A's diary entries.

The panel noted Mr Wooldridge's conduct failed to maintain appropriate boundaries, which gave rise to an inappropriate pupil-teacher relationship.

The panel found allegation 1(g)(i) proved.

ii. received a letter from her in or around March 2012;

Mr Wooldridge admitted this allegation. He said that *"Pupil A did approach me after a school concert and handed me a note. The next day, I went to see the Headmaster to inform him that I was concerned that she had approached me, on this and other occasions."*

Pupil A stated that she *"wrote a letter to apologise, as I thought it may be used as evidence and therefore, I placed no blame on him. I wrote a draft letter beforehand and stuck this in my diary."*

The panel noted in accepting Pupil A's letter, Mr Wooldridge's conduct failed to maintain appropriate boundaries as this was contrary to a management direction. The panel noted that after he received the letter, Mr Wooldridge did inform the Headteacher which was professionally appropriate.

The panel found allegation 1(g)(ii) proved.

iii. lent her The Notebook (a DVD) in or around April 2012;

Mr Wooldridge admitted this allegation. He said that he *"lent a DVD of this film (rating 12A) to a group of three or four pupils (including Pupil A)."*

Pupil A stated *"on 21 April 2012, Mr Wooldridge asked me if I had watched any films and he lent me the Notebook."* When questioned, Pupil A was asked if she was alone when Mr Wooldridge lent her The Notebook. Pupil A replied *"yes, I was alone."*

The panel noted Mr Wooldridge's conduct failed to maintain appropriate boundaries.

The panel found allegation 1(g)(iii) proved.

iv. received cufflinks from her with the personalised message 'cricket' and '118' in or around June 2012;

Mr Wooldridge admitted this allegation. He said that *"on the day before Pupil A left Eastbourne College, she approached me with a friend to give me an inexpensive pair of cufflinks: other pupils gave me a range of gifts."*

The panel noted Mr Wooldridge's conduct was contrary to a management direction and therefore he failed to maintain appropriate boundaries.

The panel found allegation 1(g)(iv) proved.

h. Met her 1:1 for coffee in the local town in or around February 2012;

Mr Wooldridge admitted this allegation. He said *“this did happen and was fully investigated by the school in 2012. I do regret doing so, but it was out of sympathy because Pupil A had been disappointed at not being allowed to join our family skiing holiday and had also suffered unpleasant behaviour from other pupils after she helped [REDACTED] with her chapel talk the previous week.”*

Pupil A stated *“on 17 February 2012, Mr Wooldridge sent me a text message and invited me to go out for coffee again, but this time, we were unable to go to his house as it was not empty. Mr Wooldridge suggested we met up in town.”*

The panel noted Mr Wooldridge’s conduct failed to maintain appropriate boundaries, which gave rise to an inappropriate pupil-teacher relationship.

The panel found allegation 1(h) proved.

i. Gave her your new mobile number on or around 28 June 2012;

Mr Wooldridge admitted this allegation, but stated it was on 30 June 2012 when Pupil A was no longer a pupil. He said that *“There was a strong culture that pupils were no longer pupils after Speech Day, which was 30 June 2012. At that time – and for several years afterwards – it was understood that, from that day onwards, leavers were now Old Eastbournians. As the Ball ended, in a crowded room, in the presence of other leavers and other teachers, [Pupil A] asked for my number. I accept I provided it to her; not doing so would have seemed rude when many others were present, and this was not against any school policy at the time.”*

Pupil A stated *“it was speech day and the leavers ball and Mr Wooldridge gave me his new mobile number during this event.”* Pupil A stated in her oral evidence that she still considered herself to be a pupil at the leavers ball.

The panel noted Mr Wooldridge’s conduct failed to maintain appropriate boundaries, which gave rise to an inappropriate pupil-teacher relationship.

The panel found allegation 1(i) proved.

j. Met her 1:1 for coffee in the local town on results day on or around 20 August 2012;

Mr Wooldridge admitted this allegation, but stated that Pupil A was no longer a pupil. He said that he *“did meet [Pupil A] on this date (exam results day when many former pupils return for the day), but it was at her instigation, and she was no longer by then a pupil.”*

Pupil A stated *“Mr Wooldridge asked if I was free and if I wanted to go for coffee.”* Pupil A stated that *“Mr Wooldridge was quite keen to meet up for coffee again. I received my results from him and he said let me know when you’re free. We text each other to arrange a time.”*

The panel noted Mr Wooldridge’s conduct in meeting Pupil A, shortly after she had left school, failed to maintain appropriate boundaries.

The panel found allegation 1(j) proved.

k. Engaged in an intimate and/or sexual relationship with her following her departure from the school, in particular you:

ii. discussed feelings of love with her in or around January 2013;

Mr Wooldridge admitted this allegation. Mr Wooldridge stated that Pupil A *“had got in touch with me in January 2013, and asked to meet me at short notice. [Pupil A] informed me that she was thinking about me too much and felt too much of a pull to communicate with me, and travelled to Eastbourne to meet me. [Pupil A] was quite emotional, and I tried to be rational and help her. I made it clear that I wanted her to lead her university life to the full. We agreed to break off communication, but - after three weeks of no communication – [Pupil A] again texted me to say that she wanted to talk.”*

Pupil A stated that in January 2013, Mr Wooldridge had *“told me that he loved me”* and that this was *“a common theme whenever I wanted to back away.”* He would do something that *“made our relationship far more solid.”*

The panel also had sight of Pupil A’s diary entries from this time period which supported Pupil A’s oral evidence.

The panel noted Mr Wooldridge’s conduct failed to maintain appropriate boundaries, given that he had been in almost continuous contact with Pupil A during her time as a Pupil and since she had left the School.

The panel found allegation 1(k)(ii) proved.

iii. discussed sexual activity with her in or around March 2013;

Mr Wooldridge denied this allegation. Mr Wooldridge stated that *“any conversation in March / April 2013 that included matters of a sexual nature would have been because [Pupil A] wanted to tell me about her university exploits with male students.”*

The panel had sight of text messages between Pupil A and Mr Wooldridge during this time. Pupil A stated that she had Skype calls with Mr Wooldridge where he would watch her in the shower or take her top off. The panel noted that Skype calls were arranged in March 2013 between Pupil A and Mr Wooldridge.

The panel noted Mr Wooldridge’s conduct failed to maintain appropriate boundaries, given that he had been in almost continuous contact with Pupil A during her time as a pupil and since she had left the School.

On the balance of probabilities, the panel found allegation 1(k)(iii) proved.

iv. met her 1:1 at a hotel in or around March 2013;

Mr Wooldridge denied this allegation.

Pupil A stated that she did meet Mr Wooldridge at a hotel.

The panel could see that text messages were exchanged between Pupil A and Mr Wooldridge on 5 April 2013 discussing a booking for a hotel. On 8 April, Mr Wooldridge

sent a text message to Pupil A stating “*Do you want me to pick you up from the station or at the hotel?*” On this same date Mr Wooldridge asked for Pupil A’s room number and Pupil A responds “121”. While the panel noted that there was no evidence that Mr Wooldridge stayed in a hotel with Pupil A, on the balance of probabilities, it concluded that Mr Wooldridge met Pupil A at a hotel.

The panel noted Mr Wooldridge’s conduct failed to maintain appropriate boundaries, given that he had been in almost continuous contact with Pupil A during her time as a pupil and since she had left the School.

The panel found allegation 1(k)(iv) proved.

v. engaged in physical / sexual contact with her on or around 8 April 2013 at your home;

Mr Wooldridge admitted that he engaged in physical contact, but not sexual contact, with Pupil A on or around 8 April 2013. Mr Wooldridge stated that Pupil A “*visited my home in April 2013. At her suggestion, I gave her a shoulder massage, but this was not of a sexual nature, although there was clearly physical contact. She was clothed, with her shoulders uncovered. This was approaching a year after [Pupil A] had ceased to be a pupil at the school, she suggested this activity, and it was not sexual in any way.*”

During the hearing, Mr Wooldridge stated that Pupil A was topless, but was wearing underwear. The panel noted that this was in contradiction to what he said in his written evidence. In addition, Mr Wooldridge stated that Pupil A gave him a back massage, during which he was topless.

When asked to describe the massage, Pupil A stated that she was topless with no underwear on the top half of her body and Mr Wooldridge was moving his hands towards the front of her body.

The panel placed greater weight on Pupil A’s description of the massage, being both physical and sexual in nature. The panel noted the environment of where the massage took place i.e. Pupil A and Mr Wooldridge were alone together in his home.

The panel noted Mr Wooldridge’s conduct failed to maintain appropriate boundaries, given that he had been in almost continuous contact with Pupil A during her time as a pupil and since she had left the School.

The panel found allegation 1(k)(v) proved.

vi. engaged in intercourse with her in or around May 2013;

Mr Wooldridge admitted this allegation. He stated that a “*romantic and sexual relationship between [Pupil A] and myself did begin in June 2013 (not May 2013), almost a year after she had left the School.*”

Pupil A stated that “*although I cannot recall the exact date, in or around May/June 2013, I had sexual intercourse with Mr Wooldridge.*”

The panel noted Mr Wooldridge’s conduct failed to maintain appropriate boundaries, given that he had been in almost continuous contact with Pupil A during her time as a pupil and since she had left the School.

The panel found allegation 1(k)(vi) proved.

2. Failed to follow management warnings and/or instructions and/or demonstrate insight into previous concerns in respect of your conduct towards Pupil A, in particular:

a. your conduct in texting her at 1(a) continued after:

i. a meeting on 6 December 2010 at which you agreed not to text her;

Mr Wooldridge admitted this allegation. He stated that the Deputy Head said that he should “*desist*” from texting Pupil A and that he “*duly did for several months, until the message sent out of concern for Pupil A’s welfare in June 2011.*”

The panel had sight of the letter dated 21 June 2011 from the Deputy Headmaster to Mr Wooldridge, which referred to a meeting between them on 6 December 2010 where Mr Wooldridge had agreed not to text Pupil A.

The panel found allegation 2(a)(i) proved.

ii. a letter dated 21 June 2011 instructing you not to text pupils without specific permission to do so;

Mr Wooldridge admitted this allegation. He stated that he sent a text message to Pupil A “*out of concern for Pupil A’s welfare.*”

The panel had sight of the letter dated 21 June 2011 from the Deputy Headmaster to Mr Wooldridge, which stated “*I must insist that you stop texting pupils unless you have been given specific permission to do so.*”

The panel found allegation 2(a)(ii) proved.

b. your conduct in giving her your mobile number at 1(i) was after:

i. a letter dated 21 June 2011 stating that giving pupils personal contact details was contrary to the school’s policy on safer working practice;

Mr Wooldridge denied this allegation. He stated that Pupil A was no longer a pupil at the time he gave her his mobile number at the leavers ball on 30 June 2012.

Pupil A stated that she considered herself to still be a pupil at this date.

The panel had sight of the letter dated 21 June 2011 which stated that “*Adults should ensure that all communications are transparent and open to scrutiny. They should not give their personal contact details to pupils including e-mail, home or mobile telephone numbers, unless the need to do so is agreed with senior management.*”

The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge attended the leavers ball in the capacity of a member of the School’s teaching staff. Pupil A attended the ball with her pupil peers.

The panel found allegation 2(b)(i) proved.

ii. a Final Written Warning dated 6 March 2012 instructing you to cease all contact with Pupil A and/or to change your mobile number as a measure to prevent contact with Pupil A;

Mr Wooldridge denied this allegation, stating that when he contacted Pupil A after 6 March 2012, she was no longer a pupil.

The panel had sight of the letter from the Headmaster dated 6 March 2012 to Mr Wooldridge stating that all communication with Pupil A must cease, noting that everyday courtesies should be maintained.

Pupil A stated *“Mr Wooldridge changed his mobile number. We did not speak for the first couple of weeks but as time progressed, we slowly got back to normal. He told me that he was really struggling because we were not talking.”*

During the hearing, Pupil A stated that she and Mr Wooldridge *“kept their distance from each other”* after the warning, but he did *“what he could get way with. If there were moments to talk to me, he would, where nobody could see.”*

The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge did have communications with Pupil A in April 2012 when he lent her The Notebook film, which the panel considered to be communication which was more than the normal everyday courtesies.

The panel found allegation 2(b)(ii) proved.

c. Your conduct as may be found proven at 1g(ii)-(iv) and/or 1(i)-(k) was after:

i. submitting a written document to the school in or around February 2012 in which you promised not to have any further contact with Pupil A;

The panel considered this allegation in respect of the proven allegations only i.e. 1(g)(ii)-(iv) and 1(i), 1(k)(ii), 1(k)(iii), 1(k)(iv), 1(k)(v), 1(k)(vi).

Mr Wooldridge admitted this allegation, but stated that his conduct in allegations 1(i) to (k) were after Pupil A had left the School.

The panel had sight of Mr Wooldridge’s written document under a section heading *“Documents relating to 2012 disciplinary.”* In this document Mr Wooldridge stated *“I give my full and utter assurance that I will never again text or call a pupil’s mobile phone.”*

The panel had sight of a further written document from Mr Wooldridge where he stated *“This is obvious but I promise to make no further contact with [Pupil A]. I will also report immediately any contact she tries to make with me.”*

The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge did have contact with Pupil A after February 2012 when he gave lent Pupil A The Notebook DVD in or around April 2012 and received cufflinks from her in or around June 2012.

Mr Wooldridge admitted that he gave his mobile number to Pupil A on 30 June 2012 when he stated that Pupil A was no longer a pupil.

Pupil A stated *“it was speech day and the leavers ball and Mr Wooldridge gave me his new mobile number during this event.”* Pupil A stated in her oral evidence that she still considered herself to be a pupil at the leavers ball.

The panel found allegation 2(c)(i) proved.

ii. receiving a Final Written Warning dated 6 March 2012 and effective until on or around 26 February 2014 stating that all communication with pupil A other than everyday courtesies must cease;

The panel considered this allegation in respect of the proven allegations only i.e. 1(g)(ii)-(iv) and 1(i), 1(k)(ii), 1(k)(iii), 1(k)(iv), 1(k)(v), 1(k)(vi).

Mr Wooldridge admitted this allegation, but stated that his conduct in allegations 1(i) to 1(k) was after Pupil A had left the School.

The panel had sight of the letter from the Headmaster dated 6 March 2012 to Mr Wooldridge stating that all communication with Pupil A must cease, noting that everyday courtesies should be maintained.

The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge did have communications with Pupil A in or around April 2012 when he lent her The Notebook film, which the panel considered to be communication which was more than the normal everyday courtesies. The panel also noted that Mr Wooldridge received cufflinks in or around June 2012 from Pupil A.

The panel found allegation 2(c)(ii) proved.

d. You failed to report 1(g)(ii) and/or 1(g)(iv) and/or 1(i)-(k) after:

i. submitting a written document to the school in or around February 2012 in which you indicated that you would immediately report any attempted contact from Pupil A;

The panel considered this allegation in respect of the proven allegations only i.e. 1(g)(ii) and 1(g)(iv) and 1(i), 1(k)(ii), 1(k)(iii), 1(k)(iv), 1(k)(v), 1(k)(vi).

Mr Wooldridge admitted this allegation, but stated that his conduct in allegation 1(i) to 1(k) was after Pupil A had left the School.

The panel had sight of a written document from Mr Wooldridge where he stated *“This is obvious but I promise to make no further contact with [Pupil A]. I will also report immediately any contact she tries to make with me.”*

The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge did have contact with Pupil A after February 2012 when he received a letter from Pupil A in around March 2012, which he reported to the Headteacher, and received cufflinks from her in or around June 2012 which he did not report.

The panel found allegation 2(d)(i) proved.

ii. receiving a Final Written Warning dated 6 March 2012 and effective until on or around 26 February 2014 stating that you were required to report any attempted contact from Pupil A;

Mr Wooldridge admitted this allegation.

The panel considered this allegation in respect of the proven allegations only i.e. 1(g)(ii) and 1(g)(iv) and 1(i), 1(k)(ii), 1(k)(iii), 1(k)(iv), 1(k)(v), 1(k)(vi).

Mr Wooldridge admitted this allegation, but stated that his conduct in allegations 1(i) to 1(k) was after Pupil A had left the School.

The panel had sight of the letter from the Headmaster dated 6 March 2012 to Mr Wooldridge stating that all communication with Pupil A must cease, noting that everyday courtesies should be maintained.

The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge did have contact with Pupil A after February 2012 when he received a letter from Pupil A in around March 2012 and received cufflinks from her in or around June 2012. Mr Wooldridge did not report this contact from Pupil A.

The panel found allegation 2(d)(ii) proved.

3. Provided misleading and/or inaccurate information to the school in or around February 2012 as part of their investigation into your conduct towards Pupil A in that you:

a. stated that your text communication with Pupil A had been limited to 6 messages and/or the preceding 3 weeks in time and/or the topic of her invitation to your family skiing holiday when this was not in fact the case;

Mr Wooldridge denied this allegation. Mr Wooldridge stated *“I completely reject any claim that I deliberately failed to provide full, relevant information in the disciplinary process of 2012.... My recall at the time, off the top of my head, was that I sent texts on approximately 6 occasions.”*

The panel concluded that on the balance of probabilities Mr Wooldridge did provide misleading and/or inaccurate information to the School, although there was no evidence that he did this deliberately.

The text messages from 2012 or the preceding years were not available to the panel. The panel did note however that Mr Wooldridge had admitted to texting Pupil A from approximately November 2010, which was more than 3 weeks preceding the February 2012 investigation. The panel noted that the School was aware of Mr Wooldridge texting Pupil A in November 2010.

The panel found allegation 3(a) proved.

b. stated that you had decided to delete Pupil A from your phone yourself when in fact you had deleted your messages with her as a result of her informing you to do so;

Mr Wooldridge denied this allegation. Mr Wooldridge stated *“I did not fail to disclose that I had deleted text messages. On the contrary, I said that I had.... It was my decision to delete them as I had decided that I should cease texting her, so it is not correct to state that I did so as a result of her instruction, despite her claiming in her diary to have said ‘delete’.”*

During the hearing Pupil A stated that she had texted Mr Wooldridge to delete everything as she was *“worried and concerned about his welfare”* because information had reached the Deputy Headmaster. Pupil A stated that she just sent the word *“delete”* in the text to Mr Wooldridge.

The panel believed Pupil A’s account, on the balance of probabilities, in that she stated that she had told Mr Wooldridge to delete the text messages.

The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge misled the School disciplinary hearing by failing to disclose the fact that he had deleted his messages with Pupil A as a result of her informing him to do so. The panel noted that if Mr Wooldridge did not have anything to hide then there would not have been any need to delete the messages.

The panel found allegation 3(b) proved.

4. Your conduct as may be found proven in Allegations 1-2 was sexually motivated.

Mr Wooldridge admitted his conduct at allegation 1(k)(iv) was sexually motivated but denied that the remaining allegations under 1 and 2 were sexually motivated.

The panel considered this allegation in relation to the proved allegations i.e. 1(a), 1(d), 1(e)(i), 1(e)(ii), 1(e)(iv), 1(e)(v), 1(e)(vi), 1(e)(viii), 1(f), 1g(i) – (iv), 1(h), 1(i), 1(j), 1(k)(ii), 1(k)(iii), 1(k)(iv), 1(k)(v), 1(k)(vi), 2(a)(i), 2(a)(ii), 2(b)(i), 2(b)(ii), 2(c)(i)-(ii) and 2(d)(i)-(ii).

The panel had regard for the legal adviser’s advice.

The panel noted that in the case of *Basson v GMC (2018)*, it stated *“the state of a person’s mind is not something that can be proved by direct observation. It can only be proved by inference or deduction from the surrounding evidence”*.

It was also stated in this case that a sexual motive means the conduct was done either in pursuit of sexual gratification or in pursuit of a future sexual relationship.

The panel considered that Mr Wooldridge’s over familiar contact with Pupil A during her time as a pupil at the School, was in a pursuit of a future sexual relationship. The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge was not Pupil A’s teacher and there was no reason for him to have regular contact with her. The panel also took into account Witness B’s oral evidence where she stated that she had *“never seen Pupil A hanging around with Pupil C”* ([REDACTED]), so the panel did not consider that this would have been a reason as to why Mr Wooldridge would have had any regular contact with Pupil A.

The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge failed to maintain appropriate boundaries with Pupil A in respect of the aforementioned proven allegations. The panel noted it was completely inappropriate for Mr Wooldridge to drive Pupil A to his house and show her around. The panel concluded that it was likely that there was sexual motive behind this conduct.

The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge's contact with Pupil A was almost continuous from when Pupil A was a pupil to when they began a sexual relationship. The relationship between Pupil A and Mr Wooldridge led to sexual intercourse in or around May / June 2013, which was less than one year since Pupil A left the School.

The panel considered the case of GMC v Haris (2020). The panel asked itself whether on the balance of probabilities reasonable persons would think the words and actions found proven could be sexual. The panel considered that there was no other reason for Mr Wooldridge to have contact with Pupil A, other than if it were to be sexually motivated, especially as the relationship was established at the School. The panel was of the view that his conduct would be considered by a reasonable person to be sexually motivated, especially as the continuation of the relationship led to a sexual relationship. The panel considered that in all the circumstances of the conduct in the case, it was more likely than not that the teacher's purpose of such conduct was sexual.

The panel found allegation 4 proved.

5. Your conduct as may be found proven at Allegations 1(b) and/or 1(e)(iii) and/or 1(e)(viii) and/or 3(a)-(b) was dishonest and/or lacked integrity.

Mr Wooldridge denied this allegation.

The panel considered this allegation in respect of the proven allegations i.e. 1(e)(viii), 3(a) and 3(b).

The panel had regard for the legal adviser's advice when considering the allegation of dishonesty. The panel needed first to ascertain subjectively the actual state of Mr Wooldridge's knowledge or belief as to the facts. Secondly, the panel needed to determine whether Mr Wooldridge's state of mind was honest or dishonest by the application of the objective standards of the ordinary honest person.

The panel firstly turned its mind to the actual state of Mr Wooldridge's knowledge or belief as to the facts. The panel considered allegation 1e(viii) where the panel found that Mr Wooldridge had instructed Pupil A not to tell anyone about the events of the day on 2 February 2012, when he drove Pupil A to his home and showed her around. The panel noted that by instructing Pupil A to not tell anyone about taking her to his home, Mr Wooldridge knew that his conduct was inappropriate and tried to ensure that his conduct would not be disclosed to anyone.

The panel also considered allegations 3a and 3b. The panel noted that by deleting Pupil A's text messages, Mr Wooldridge concealed the content from the School's investigation. The panel noted that if Mr Wooldridge did not have anything to hide, there would have been no reason to delete the messages. Therefore, the panel found that Mr Wooldridge's conduct was clearly dishonest. Furthermore, the panel found that his actions would be regarded by the standards of ordinary, decent people to be dishonest.

When considering lack of integrity, the panel recognised that this allegation relates to adherence to the ethical standards of one's own profession that involves more than mere honesty. It is linked to the manner in which the profession professes to serve the public.

The panel recognised that in addition to Mr Wooldridge acting dishonestly, Mr Wooldridge's conduct adversely impacted Pupil A, her parents, the wider pupil community, colleagues and the School as a whole.

The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge's conduct had the potential to attract negative publicity and cause reputational damage to the School. The panel noted Mr Wooldridge's disregard for statutory standards in place at the time of his misconduct, although he confirmed his awareness of them.

The panel also found that Mr Wooldridge's conduct in the aforementioned allegations lacked integrity.

The panel found allegation 5 proved.

The panel found the following particulars of the allegations against you not proved.

1. You failed to maintain appropriate boundaries and/or engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil A in that you:

a. encouraged and/or instructed her to save your contact details in her phone under a different name;

Mr Wooldridge denied this allegation. He stated that he *"did not use a different name for Pupil A, nor did I suggest that she should do so for me; because I had been a senior housemaster, I was used (and permitted) to using my mobile to contact pupils, as verified in the attached Staff handbook, and I had many of their names on my contacts list."*

Pupil A stated in her witness statement that *"we saved each other in our phones under a different name however, I cannot recall what these names were. I can confirm that this was Mr Wooldridge's idea."*

When questioned by the teacher's representative, Pupil A stated that she didn't know if Mr Wooldridge had asked her to save his contact details in her phone under a different name.

The panel noted that Pupil A's account was not consistent as she could not recall with any certainty whether Mr Wooldridge had in fact encouraged and/or instructed her to save his contact details in her phone under a different name.

On the balance of probabilities, the panel found allegation 1(b) not proved.

c. engaged in one or more conversations of a sexual nature with her during the 2011/12 academic year and/or asked her:

i. about the extent of her sexual experience in or around September 2011;

Mr Wooldridge denied this allegation. He stated *"There is absolutely no way that I would ever have asked any pupil how far he or she had gone sexually with someone.."*

Pupil A stated in her witness statement that *"In September 2011, whilst sitting on the cricket field with Mr Wooldridge, he asked various questions regarding my relationships with older boys and specifically how far I had been sexually with anyone at that age."*

The panel did not consider Pupil A's account to be compelling when questioned about this allegation in oral evidence.

On the balance of probabilities, the panel found allegation 1(c)(i) not proved.

ii. what age was too old for her in the context of relationships and/or sexual activity in or around September 2011;

Mr Wooldridge denied this allegation. He stated *“There is absolutely no way that I would ever have asked any pupil how far he or she had gone sexually with someone, or what age was or was not appropriate. I never had such personal conversations with Pupil A or anyone else.”*

Pupil A stated in her witness statement that *“In September 2011, whilst sitting on the cricket field with Mr Wooldridge, he asked various questions regarding my relationships with older boys and specifically how far I had been sexually with anyone at that age and what age was ‘too old’. I did respond at the time and felt that these types of questions should not have been asked. I remember feeling uncomfortable at one point as the questions were so inappropriate.”*

The panel did not consider Pupil A’s account to be compelling when questioned about this allegation in oral evidence.

On the balance of probabilities, the panel found allegation 1(c)(ii) not proved.

e. on or around 2 February 2012:

iii. instructed Pupil A to duck down in your car to avoid being seen;

Mr Wooldridge denied this allegation. He stated that *“giving lifts was quite commonplace; as such, I would not have told her to ‘duck down’ but Pupil A might have taken it upon herself to do so. The fact that I collected her from the front of [REDACTED], where we were in full view of passing pupils and staff, makes it illogical that I would later suggest she hide.”*

Pupil A stated in her oral evidence that Mr Wooldridge *“told me to duck down so that we wouldn’t be seen.”* Pupil A said that Mr Wooldridge said *“Duck, there are pupils coming back from games.”*

The panel did not find Pupil A’s account to be consistent or compelling. The panel took into account the fact that there was little point of asking Pupil A to duck down having collected her from the boarding house in full view of the street.

On the balance of probabilities, the panel did not find allegation 1(e)(iii) proved.

vii. held her hand in your car;

Mr Wooldridge said *“At no point during Pupil A’s time at Eastbourne College did I ever hold her hand.”*

Pupil A stated that “when he drove me home, my hands were on my lap and he reached over and held them.”

The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge was driving at the time of this allegation and so on the balance of probabilities, the panel did not find allegation 1(e)(vii) proved.

k. Engaged in an intimate and/or sexual relationship with her following her departure from the school, in particular you:

i. kissed her on or around 17 September 2012;

Mr Wooldridge denied this allegation, stating that *“I did not kiss her at all at this time.”*

Pupil A stated that *“on 17 September 2012, I came down to Eastbourne to see my friends, I stayed at a friend’s house who lived quite close to Mr Wooldridge. During the visit, Mr Wooldridge asked if he could pick me up and go on a drive. Whilst I the car, Mr Wooldridge kissed me, and I remember feeling shocked.”*

On the balance of probabilities, and due to the lack of any other compelling evidence, the panel did not find allegation 1(k)(i) proved.

2. Failed to follow management warnings and/or instructions and/or demonstrate insight into previous concerns in respect of your conduct towards Pupil A, in particular:

b. your conduct in giving her your mobile number at 1(i) was after:

iii. yourself submitting a written document to the school in February 2012 in which you undertook never to text Pupil A’s phone;

Mr Wooldridge denied this allegation. He stated that *“the document which I submitted in February 2012 was after all of these texts and following my submission of the document, I never texted any pupil again; this clearly demonstrates that I did explicitly follow management advice from that time forwards. It is therefore incorrect to state that texting continued after this towards any pupil at the school.”*

The panel had sight of the written document under a section heading *“Documents relating to 2012 disciplinary.”* In this document Mr Wooldridge stated *“I give my full and utter assurance that I will never again text or call a pupil’s mobile phone.”*

Mr Wooldridge admitted that he gave his mobile number to Pupil A on 30 June 2012 when he stated that Pupil A was no longer a pupil.

The panel had sight of a further written document from Mr Wooldridge where he stated *“This is obvious but I promise to make no further contact with [Pupil A]. I will also report immediately any contact she tries to make with me.”*

Pupil A stated *“it was speech day and the leavers ball and Mr Wooldridge gave me his new mobile number during this event.”* Pupil A stated in her oral evidence that she still considered herself to be a pupil at the leavers ball.

Pupil A stated that she had sent Mr Wooldridge a few text messages before she had *“officially left the School, but he did not respond. He responded to my text messages a week after I had left, in early July time.”*

The assurance given in Mr Wooldridge’s written document, was specifically in relation to never texting or calling a pupil’s mobile phone, rather than former pupils. The panel noted from the evidence available that whilst Mr Wooldridge did text Pupil A after February

2012, it was not clear whether the texting occurred whilst Pupil A was still a pupil at the School.

The panel found allegation 2(a)(iii) not proved.

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

Having found a number of the allegations proved, the panel went on to consider whether the facts of those proved allegations amounted to unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

In doing so, the panel had regard to the document Teacher Misconduct: The Prohibition of Teachers, which is referred to as “the Advice”.

Findings in relation to conduct that pre-dated the Teachers’ Standards coming into effect in September 2012

The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge’s proven misconduct in allegation 1(j) when he met Pupil A for coffee in the local town on results day on or around 20 August 2012, was a failure to maintain appropriate boundaries, but the panel did not consider this to be serious misconduct falling significantly short of the standard expected of a teacher, based on their knowledge and experience of the applicable standards at the time of the conduct. The panel also took into account the fact that Pupil A had left the School at this time.

In respect of proved allegations 1(a), 1(d), 1(e)(i), 1(e)(ii), 1(e)(iv), 1(e)(v), 1(e)(vi), 1(e)(viii), 1(f), 1(g)(i), 1(g)(ii), 1(g)(iii), 1(g)(iv), 1(h), 1(i), 2(a)(i), 2(a)(ii), 2(b)(i), 2(b)(ii), 2(c)(i), 2(c)(ii), 2(d)(i), 2(d)(ii), 3(a), 3(b), 4 and 5, i.e. conduct that pre-dated the coming into effect of the September 2012 Teacher’s Standards, the panel had regard to its knowledge and experience of teaching standards at that time. The panel considered the Professional Standards for Qualified Teacher Status and Requirements for Initial Teaching Training that was in force at the time of Mr Wooldridge’s conduct in the aforementioned allegations.

The panel found that Mr Wooldridge was in breach of the following standards:

- Q1: Establishing fair, respectful, trusting, supportive and constructive relationships with children and young people.
- Q3(a): Be aware of the professional duties of teachers and the statutory framework within which they work.
- Q3(b): Be aware of the policies and practices of the workplace and share in collective responsibility for their implementation.
- Q7(a): Reflect on and improve their practice and take responsibility for identifying and meeting their developing professional needs.
- Q9: Act upon advice and feedback and be open to coaching and mentoring.
- Q21(a): Be aware of the current legal requirements, national policies and guidance on the safeguarding and promotion of the well-being of children and young people.

The panel also considered the Working Together to Safeguard Children document dated March 2010. The panel was satisfied that Mr Wooldridge's conduct in the aforementioned allegations involved breaches of Working Together to Safeguard Children. The panel considered that Mr Wooldridge was in breach of the following provision:

Everyone shares responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people.

The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge failed to maintain appropriate boundaries and he engaged in an inappropriate teacher-pupil relationship with Pupil A in respect of his conduct in the above allegations. The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge's failure to maintain appropriate boundaries and engage in an inappropriate teacher-pupil relationship with Pupil A started when Pupil A was still a pupil at the School. The panel stated that the relationship was almost continuous from when Pupil A was a pupil, to when the sexual relationship began after she had left the School. The panel considered that this was a significant factor when determining whether Mr Wooldridge's conduct amounted to unacceptable professional conduct. The panel was satisfied that the conduct of Mr Wooldridge fell significantly short of the standard of behaviour expected of a teacher.

The panel also considered whether Mr Wooldridge's conduct displayed behaviours associated with any of the offences in the list that begins on page 12 of the Advice.

The panel found that none of these offences were relevant.

The Advice indicates that where behaviours associated with such an offence exist, a panel is likely to conclude that an individual's conduct would amount to unacceptable professional conduct. Whilst the panel did not determine that these offences were relevant in respect of the proven conduct in the above allegations, the panel was satisfied that his misconduct was of a serious nature, falling significantly short of the behaviour expected of a teacher at that time.

The panel noted that the allegations 1(e)(i), 1(e)(ii), 1(e)(iv), 1(e)(v), 1(e)(viii) and 1(h) took place outside the education setting. The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge's conduct in these proven allegations, could have led to Pupil A being exposed to, or influenced by, his behaviour in a harmful way. The panel noted that whilst Mr Wooldridge had explained in his oral evidence that it was not prohibited conduct at the School at that particular time to drive a pupil in your car, the panel noted that it was not usual or acceptable conduct for a teacher to drive a pupil to his home and give a pupil a tour of his home.

Accordingly, the panel was satisfied that Mr Wooldridge was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct in respect of allegations 1(a), 1(d), 1(e)(i), 1(e)(ii), 1(e)(iv), 1(e)(v), 1(e)(vi), 1(e)(viii), 1(f), 1(g)(i), 1(g)(ii), 1(g)(iii), 1(g)(iv), 1(h), 1(i), 2(a)(i), 2(a)(ii), 2(b)(i), 2(b)(ii), 2(c)(i), 2(c)(ii), 2(d)(i), 2(d)(ii), 3(a), 3(b), 4 and 5.

Findings in relation to conduct that post-dated the Teachers' Standards coming into effect in September 2012

In respect of proved allegations 1(k)(ii), 1(k)(iii), 1(k)(iv), 1(k)(v), 1(k)(vi), i.e. conduct that post-dated the coming into effect of the September 2012 Teachers' Standards, the panel was satisfied that the conduct of Mr Wooldridge, involved breaches of the Teachers' Standards. The panel considered that, by reference to Part 2, Mr Wooldridge was in breach of the following standard:

- Teachers must have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach;

Whilst, the panel found that Mr Wooldridge was in breach of the above teaching standard, in relation to the facts found proved in allegations 1(k)(ii), 1(k)(iii), 1(k)(iv), 1(k)(v), 1(k)(vi), the panel noted that Pupil A was, at the time of the proven conduct, a former pupil and over the age of 18. The panel did not, therefore, consider that Mr Wooldridge's conduct fell significantly short of the standard of behaviour expected of a teacher.

The panel also considered whether Mr Wooldridge's conduct displayed behaviours associated with any of the offences in the list that begins on page 12 of the Advice.

The panel found that none of the offences were relevant.

The panel noted that at the time of Mr Wooldridge's conduct in proven allegations 1(k)(ii), 1(k)(iii), 1(k)(iv), 1(k)(v), 1(k)(vi), Pupil A was, a former pupil and over the age of 18. The panel noted that some of the aforementioned proven allegations took place outside the education setting, however, the panel noted again that Pupil A was a former pupil and over the age of 18. The panel did not consider that Mr Wooldridge's conduct in respect of these allegations affected the way Mr Wooldridge fulfilled his teaching role or may have led to pupils being exposed to, or influenced by, the behaviour in a harmful way.

Accordingly, the panel was not satisfied that Mr Wooldridge was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct in respect of allegations 1(k)(ii), 1(k)(iii), 1(k)(iv), 1(k)(v), 1(k)(vi).

Disrepute

The panel took into account the way the teaching profession is viewed by others, the responsibilities and duties of teachers in relation to the safeguarding and welfare of pupils and considered the influence that teachers may have on pupils, parents and others in the community. The panel also took account of the uniquely influential role that teachers can hold in pupils' lives and the fact that pupils must be able to view teachers as role models in the way that they behave. The panel considered these factors in respect of all proven allegations.

The panel also considered whether Mr Wooldridge's conduct displayed behaviours associated with any of the offences in the list that begins on page 12 of the Advice.

The panel found that none of these offences were relevant.

The panel also noted that Mr Wooldridge failed to maintain appropriate boundaries with Pupil A and engaged in an inappropriate teacher-pupil relationship when Pupil A was a pupil at the School, which subsequently resulted in an almost continuous relationship from when Pupil A left the School. The panel considered that the nature of Mr Wooldridge's conduct which led to an almost continuous relationship with Pupil A, after she had left the School, was conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

In respect of Mr Wooldridge's conduct which took place outside of the education setting i.e. proven allegations, 1(e)(i), 1(e)(ii), 1(e)(iv), 1(e)(v), 1(e)(viii), 1(h), 1(j), 1(k)(ii), 1(k)(iii), 1(k)(iv), 1(k)(v) and 1(k)(vi), the findings of misconduct are serious, and the conduct displayed would be likely to have a negative impact on the individual's status as a teacher.

The panel considered that Mr Wooldridge's conduct could potentially damage the public's perception of a teacher.

The panel therefore found that Mr Wooldridge's actions, in respect of all proven allegations, constituted conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

Having found the facts of particulars 1(a), 1(d), 1(e)(i), 1(e)(ii), 1(e)(iv), 1(e)(v), 1(e)(vi), 1(e)(viii), 1(f), 1(g)(i), 1(g)(ii), 1(g)(iii), 1(g)(iv), 1(h), 1(i), 1(j), 1(k)(ii), 1(k)(iii), 1(k)(iv), 1(k)(v), 1(k)(vi), 2(a)(i), 2(a)(ii), 2(b)(i), 2(b)(ii), 2(c)(i), 2(c)(ii), 2(d)(i), 2(d)(ii), 3(a), 3(b), 4 and 5 proved, the panel further found that Mr Wooldridge's conduct amounted to unacceptable professional conduct in respect of allegations 1(a), 1(d), 1(e)(i), 1(e)(ii), 1(e)(iv), 1(e)(v), 1(e)(vi), 1(e)(viii), 1(f), 1(g)(i), 1(g)(ii), 1(g)(iii), 1(g)(iv), 1(h), 1(i), 2(a)(i), 2(a)(ii), 2(b)(i), 2(b)(ii), 2(c)(i), 2(c)(ii), 2(d)(i), 2(d)(ii), 3(a), 3(b), 4 and 5 and found that his conduct in all proven allegations amounted to conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

Panel's recommendation to the Secretary of State

Given the panel's findings in respect of unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, 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 is appropriate, the panel had to consider the public interest, the seriousness of the behaviour and any mitigation offered by Mr Wooldridge and whether a prohibition order is necessary and proportionate. 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 a number of them to be relevant in this case, namely, the safeguarding and wellbeing 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 Wooldridge, which involved findings of sexually motivated conduct, along with findings of dishonesty and a lack of integrity, there was a strong public interest consideration in respect of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils. The panel noted the serious findings of failing to maintain appropriate boundaries and engaging in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil A.

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

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

The panel considered carefully the seriousness of the behaviour, noting that the Advice states that the expectation of both the public and pupils, is that members of the teaching

profession maintain an exemplary level of integrity and ethical standards at all times. The panel noted that a teacher's behaviour that seeks to exploit their position of trust should be viewed very seriously in terms of its potential influence on pupils and be seen as a possible threat to the public interest.

The panel took further account of the Advice, which suggests that a panel will likely consider a teacher's behaviour to be incompatible with being a teacher if there is evidence of one or more of the factors that begin on page 15. In the list of such factors, those that were relevant in this case were:

- serious departure from the personal and professional conduct elements of the Teachers' Standards;
- misconduct seriously affecting the education and/or safeguarding and well-being of pupils, and particularly where there is a continuing risk;
- abuse of position or trust (particularly involving vulnerable pupils)
- an abuse of any trust, knowledge, or influence gained through their professional position in order to advance a romantic or sexual relationship with a pupil or former pupil;
- 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;
- dishonesty or a lack of integrity, including the deliberate concealment of their actions or purposeful destruction of evidence, especially where these behaviours have been repeated or had serious consequences, or involved the coercion of another person to act in a way contrary to their own interests.

Even though some of the behaviour found proved in this case indicated that a prohibition order would be appropriate, taking account of the public interest and the seriousness of the behaviour and the likely harm to the public interest were the teacher be allowed to continue to teach, the panel went on to consider whether there were mitigating circumstances.

In the light of the panel's findings, there was evidence that Mr Wooldridge's actions were deliberate. The panel noted Mr Wooldridge's almost continuous relationship with Pupil A from when she was a pupil at the School, to after she had left. The panel stated that this continuous relationship was not accidental and Mr Wooldridge deliberately pursued Pupil A for a sexual relationship. The panel also noted that Mr Wooldridge's conduct was deliberate by his attempt to conceal his actions, as proven by allegation 1(e)(viii), where he instructed Pupil A not to tell anyone about the events of the day when he invited and then drove Pupil A to his house.

There was no evidence to suggest that Mr Wooldridge was acting under extreme duress, e.g. a physical threat or significant intimidation and, in fact, the panel found Mr Wooldridge's actions to be calculated.

The panel saw evidence that showed Mr Wooldridge was previously subject to management warnings from 2010. The panel also saw evidence that Mr Wooldridge was subject to management warnings in 2016 and 2017 in respect of his behaviour towards female pupils. Mr Wooldridge was also subject to disciplinary proceedings in 2012 and 2017.

The panel had sight of written character references from former colleagues of Mr Wooldridge.

A former colleague stated that Mr Wooldridge *“has proved to be a hugely talented and effective teacher and schoolmaster and generations of Eastbournians have been inspired by him.”* The panel noted that this statement was dated 7 January 2020.

A second former colleague of Mr Wooldridge stated *“I have the highest regard for James and all that he is and has achieved. I believe him to be utterly reliable, true to his values and suffused with an integrity that inspires others.”* The panel noted that this statement was dated 21 August 2017.

A third former colleague stated *“one would be hard pushed to find anyone who has given a more total contribution to the life and community of Eastbourne College and its families.”* The panel noted that this statement was undated.

A fourth former colleague stated *“I have found James to be loyal, hard-working, caring and passionate about the education of all pupils that he comes across.”* The panel noted that this statement was dated 21 August 2017.

A fifth former colleague stated *“James is a first-rate schoolmaster and an absolute asset to Eastbourne College.”* The panel noted that this statement was undated.

Although, the panel considered all of the character references within the papers which attested to his abilities as a teacher, it noted that the majority of the character references were not contemporaneous as they were dated a few years ago. The panel also noted that none of the individuals who gave character references were called to give evidence. The panel therefore placed limited weight on these statements.

The panel noted that at the end of giving oral evidence, Mr Wooldridge stated that he regretted his behaviour and the impact it had on his family. The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge did not demonstrate, to any great extent, his level of insight or remorse for the wider impact his conduct had on Pupil A, the School or the community. In fact, the panel noted that Mr Wooldridge had a tendency to repeatedly blame Pupil A during the course of the hearing. The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge was an experienced teacher of 30 years, in a position of trust and should have known better than to blur the boundaries with Pupil A and engage in an inappropriate teacher-pupil relationship.

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 would be sufficient would unacceptably compromise the public interest considerations present in this case, despite the severity of the consequences for Mr Wooldridge of prohibition.

The panel was of the view that prohibition was both proportionate and appropriate. The panel decided that the public interest considerations outweighed the interests of Mr Wooldridge. The findings of dishonesty, lack of integrity and sexually motivated conduct were a significant factor in forming that opinion. In addition, the panel noted the fact that Mr Wooldridge’s inappropriate relationship with Pupil A started whilst Pupil A was still a

pupil and was almost continuous from the day that Pupil A left the School. 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 for it to decide to recommend a review period of the order. 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 cases involving certain conduct where it is likely that the public interest will have greater relevance and weigh in favour of not offering a review period. One of these cases includes 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 his professional position to influence or exploit a person or persons. The panel found that Mr Wooldridge was responsible for conduct that was sexually motivated. The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge used his professional position to influence Pupil A to further a future sexual relationship. This behaviour links to the above case of serious sexual misconduct.

The panel noted the absence of mitigating circumstances when considering Mr Wooldridge's proven misconduct. The panel noted Mr Wooldridge's sheer lack of insight into the impact his conduct had on Pupil A, the School and the wider community. Mr Wooldridge stated that he was remorseful and apologised to Pupil A, but focused on the effect of his conduct had on himself and his family. The panel also noted Mr Wooldridge's tendency to blame Pupil A throughout the course of the hearing, when he was the teacher, in a position of trust and responsibility. The panel noted that since these events considered by the panel, Mr Wooldridge has been subject to further warnings in respect of his conduct towards female pupils in 2016 and 2017. Therefore, the panel noted that if Mr Wooldridge were to teach again, there would be a significant danger and continuing risk that he could repeat this type of serious misconduct again. This formed a significant factor in determining whether a review period was appropriate.

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 with no 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 some of the allegations proven and found that some of those proven facts amount to unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute. The panel have set this out in some detail, including looking at standards pre and post 2012. The panel has set out the following:

“The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge’s proven misconduct in allegation 1(j) when he met Pupil A for coffee in the local town on results day on or around 20 August 2012, was a failure to maintain appropriate boundaries, but the panel did not consider this to be serious misconduct falling significantly short of the standard expected of a teacher, based on their knowledge and experience of the applicable standards at the time of the conduct. The panel also took into account the fact that Pupil A had left the School at this time.

In respect of proved allegations 1(a), 1(d), 1(e)(i), 1(e)(ii), 1(e)(iv), 1(e)(v), 1(e)(vi), 1(e)(viii), 1(f), 1(g)(i), 1(g)(ii), 1(g)(iii), 1(g)(iv), 1(h), 1(i), 2(a)(i), 2(a)(ii), 2(b)(i), 2(b)(ii), 2(c)(i), 2(c)(ii), 2(d)(i), 2(d)(ii), 3(a), 3(b), 4 and 5, i.e. conduct that pre-dated the coming into effect of the September 2012 Teacher’s Standards, the panel had regard to its knowledge and experience of teaching standards at that time. The panel considered the Professional Standards for Qualified Teacher Status and Requirements for Initial Teaching Training that was in force at the time of Mr Wooldridge’s conduct in the aforementioned allegations.”

The panel found that Mr Wooldridge was in breach of the following standards:

- Q1: Establishing fair, respectful, trusting, supportive and constructive relationships with children and young people.
- Q3(a): Be aware of the professional duties of teachers and the statutory framework within which they work.
- Q3(b): Be aware of the policies and practices of the workplace and share in collective responsibility for their implementation.
- Q7(a): Reflect on and improve their practice and take responsibility for identifying and meeting their developing professional needs.
- Q9: Act upon advice and feedback and be open to coaching and mentoring.
- Q21(a): Be aware of the current legal requirements, national policies and guidance on the safeguarding and promotion of the well-being of children and young people.

The panel also considered the Working Together to Safeguard Children document dated March 2010. The panel was satisfied that Mr Wooldridge’s conduct in the aforementioned allegations involved breaches of Working Together to Safeguard Children. The panel considered that Mr Wooldridge was in breach of the following provision:

“Everyone shares responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people.”

“Accordingly, the panel was satisfied that Mr Wooldridge was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct in respect of allegations 1(a), 1(d), 1(e)(i), 1(e)(ii), 1(e)(iv), 1(e)(v), 1(e)(vi), 1(e)(viii), 1(f), 1(g)(i), 1(g)(ii), 1(g)(iii), 1(g)(iv), 1(h), 1(i), 2(a)(i), 2(a)(ii), 2(b)(i), 2(b)(ii), 2(c)(i), 2(c)(ii), 2(d)(i), 2(d)(ii), 3(a), 3(b), 4 and 5.”

The panel also state:

“In respect of proved allegations 1(k)(ii), 1(k)(iii), 1(k)(iv), 1(k)(v), 1(k)(vi), i.e. conduct that post-dated the coming into effect of the September 2012 Teachers’ Standards, the panel was satisfied that the conduct of Mr Wooldridge, involved breaches of the Teachers’

Standards. The panel considered that, by reference to Part 2, Mr Wooldridge was in breach of the following standard:

- Teachers must have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach;

Whilst, the panel found that Mr Wooldridge was in breach of the above teaching standard, in relation to the facts found proved in allegations 1(k)(ii), 1(k)(iii), 1(k)(iv), 1(k)(v), 1(k)(vi), the panel noted that Pupil A was, at the time of the proven conduct, a former pupil and over the age of 18. The panel did not, therefore, consider that Mr Wooldridge's conduct fell significantly short of the standard of behaviour expected of a teacher."

"In respect of Mr Wooldridge's conduct which took place outside of the education setting i.e. proven allegations, 1(e)(i), 1(e)(ii), 1(e)(iv), 1(e)(v), 1(e)(viii), 1(h), 1(j), 1(k)(ii), 1(k)(iii), 1(k)(iv), 1(k)(v) and 1(k)(vi), the findings of misconduct are serious, and the conduct displayed would be likely to have a negative impact on the individual's status as a teacher.

The panel considered that Mr Wooldridge's conduct could potentially damage the public's perception of a teacher.

The panel therefore found that Mr Wooldridge's actions, in respect of all proven allegations, constituted conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

Having found the facts of particulars 1(a), 1(d), 1(e)(i), 1(e)(ii), 1(e)(iv), 1(e)(v), 1(e)(vi), 1(e)(viii), 1(f), 1(g)(i), 1(g)(ii), 1(g)(iii), 1(g)(iv), 1(h), 1(i), 1(j), 1(k)(ii), 1(k)(iii), 1(k)(iv), 1(k)(v), 1(k)(vi), 2(a)(i), 2(a)(ii), 2(b)(i), 2(b)(ii), 2(c)(i), 2(c)(ii), 2(d)(i), 2(d)(ii), 3(a), 3(b), 4 and 5 proved, the panel further found that Mr Wooldridge's conduct amounted to unacceptable professional conduct in respect of allegations 1(a), 1(d), 1(e)(i), 1(e)(ii), 1(e)(iv), 1(e)(v), 1(e)(vi), 1(e)(viii), 1(f), 1(g)(i), 1(g)(ii), 1(g)(iii), 1(g)(iv), 1(h), 1(i), 2(a)(i), 2(a)(ii), 2(b)(i), 2(b)(ii), 2(c)(i), 2(c)(ii), 2(d)(i), 2(d)(ii), 3(a), 3(b), 4 and 5 and found that his conduct in all proven allegations amounted to conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute."

I have adhered to all of these findings in my considerations of this case. In particular for all those matters not found proven or not found to amount to unacceptable professional conduct or conduct likely to bring the profession into disrepute, I can confirm that I have put all those matters entirely from my mind.

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

In particular, the paragraphs above set out exactly which of the standards the panel has found Mr Wooldridge to be guilty.

The findings of misconduct are particularly serious as they, "involved findings of sexually motivated conduct, along with findings of dishonesty and a lack of integrity, there was a strong public interest consideration in respect of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils. The panel noted the serious findings of failing to maintain appropriate boundaries and engaging in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil A."

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 unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, 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 Wooldridge, and the impact that will have on the teacher, is proportionate and in the public interest.

In this case, I have considered the extent to which a prohibition order would protect children and safeguard pupils. The panel has observed, "The panel found that Mr Wooldridge was responsible for conduct that was sexually motivated. The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge used his professional position to influence Pupil A to further a future sexual relationship. This behaviour links to the above case of serious sexual misconduct." 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, "The panel noted that at the end of giving oral evidence, Mr Wooldridge stated that he regretted his behaviour and the impact it had on his family. The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge did not demonstrate, to any great extent, his level of insight or remorse for the wider impact his conduct had on Pupil A, the School or the community. In fact, the panel noted that Mr Wooldridge had a tendency to repeatedly blame Pupil A during the course of the hearing. The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge was an experienced teacher of 30 years, in a position of trust and should have known better than to blur the boundaries with Pupil A and engage in an inappropriate teacher-pupil relationship." In my judgement, the lack of full insight or remorse means that there is some risk of the repetition of this behaviour and this puts at risk the future wellbeing 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, "Similarly, the panel considered that public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Mr Wooldridge was not treated with the utmost seriousness when regulating the conduct of the profession.

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

The panel considered carefully the seriousness of the behaviour, noting that the Advice states that the expectation of both the public and pupils, is that members of the teaching profession maintain an exemplary level of integrity and ethical standards at all times. The panel noted that a teacher's behaviour that seeks to exploit their position of trust should be viewed very seriously in terms of its potential influence on pupils and be seen as a possible threat to the public interest." I am particularly mindful of the finding of lack of integrity and sexual misconduct 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 Wooldridge himself. The panel comment “Although, the panel considered all of the character references within the papers which attested to his abilities as a teacher, it noted that the majority of the character references were not contemporaneous as they were dated a few years ago. The panel also noted that none of the individuals who gave character references were called to give evidence. The panel therefore placed limited weight on these statements.”

A prohibition order would prevent Mr Wooldridge 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, “The panel found that Mr Wooldridge was responsible for conduct that was sexually motivated. The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge used his professional position to influence Pupil A to further a future sexual relationship. This behaviour links to the above case of serious sexual misconduct.”

I have also placed considerable weight on the finding of the panel that, “Mr Wooldridge’s conduct was deliberate by his attempt to conceal his actions, as proven by allegation 1(e)(viii), where he instructed Pupil A not to tell anyone about the events of the day when he invited and then drove Pupil A to his house.”

I have given less weight in my consideration of sanction therefore, to the contribution that Mr Wooldridge 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 full remorse or insight, does not in my view satisfy the public interest requirement concerning public confidence in the profession.

For 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 “The panel found that Mr Wooldridge was responsible for conduct that was sexually motivated. The panel noted that Mr Wooldridge used his professional position to influence Pupil A to further a future sexual relationship. This behaviour links to the above case of serious sexual misconduct.

The panel noted the absence of mitigating circumstances when considering Mr Wooldridge’s proven misconduct. The panel noted Mr Wooldridge’s sheer lack of insight into the impact his conduct had on Pupil A, the School and the wider community. Mr Wooldridge stated that he was remorseful and apologised to Pupil A, but focused on the effect of his conduct had on himself and his family. The panel also noted Mr Wooldridge’s tendency to blame Pupil A throughout the course of the hearing, when he was the

teacher, in a position of trust and responsibility. The panel noted that since these events considered by the panel, Mr Wooldridge has been subject to further warnings in respect of his conduct towards female pupils in 2016 and 2017. Therefore, the panel noted that if Mr Wooldridge were to teach again, there would be a significant danger and continuing risk that he could repeat this type of serious misconduct again. This formed a significant factor in determining whether a review period was appropriate.”

I have considered whether not allowing for a review period reflects the seriousness of the findings and is proportionate to achieve the aim of maintaining public confidence in the profession. In this case, the factors are the sexual element of the case, the lack of integrity 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 James Wooldridge 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 James Wooldridge 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 James Wooldridge has a right of appeal to the King’s Bench Division of the High Court within 28 days from the date he is given notice of this order.



Decision maker: Alan Meyrick

Date: 26 October 2022

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