



Teaching  
Regulation  
Agency

# **Mr Christopher Reene: Professional conduct panel outcome**

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

**November 2023**

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

<b>Teacher:</b>	Mr Christopher Reene
<b>Teacher ref number:</b>	9762865
<b>Teacher date of birth:</b>	17 April 1975
<b>TRA reference:</b>	19980
<b>Date of determination:</b>	29 November 2023
<b>Former employer:</b>	Ratton School Academy Trust, Eastbourne

### **Introduction**

A professional conduct panel ('the panel') of the Teaching Regulation Agency ('the TRA') convened on 27 to 29 November by way of a virtual hearing, to consider the case of Mr Christopher Reene.

The panel members were Ms Jasmin Choudhury (teacher panellist – in the chair), Mr Dara Islam (lay panellist) and Ms Amanda Godfrey (former teacher panellist).

The legal adviser to the panel was Ms Natalie Kent of Birketts LLP solicitors.

The presenting officer for the TRA was Mr Charles Drinnan instructed by Kingsley Napley solicitors.

Mr Reene was not present and was not represented at the hearing.

The hearing took place by way of a virtual hearing in public and was recorded.

## Allegations

The panel considered the allegations set out in the notice of proceedings dated 13 September 2023.

It was alleged that Mr Reene was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, in that while employed as a teacher at Ratton School, between the end of 2019 and September 2020:

1. He developed an inappropriate relationship with Child A;
2. He sent inappropriate messages to Child A via WhatsApp and/or Twitch and/or TikTok including:
  - a. Sending a heart emoji;
  - b. Sending a topless photo of himself.
3. He shared personal information about himself with Child A including:
  - a. Providing Child A with his personal telephone number;
  - b. Informing Child A he was a teacher at Ratton School;
  - c. Sending Child A a photo of himself with his parents.
4. He sent monies to the value of approximately £700 to Child A including:
  - a. In the form of 'Bits' (a e gaming currency) paid via Child A's Twitch account and/or;
  - b. via PayPal.
5. He sent one or more gifts to Child A via post including:
  - a. Two hats and/or a drinks bottle;
6. On 6 October 2020, at the first investigation meeting, he told individual A that he had deleted all evidence of his communication with Child A when he knew or ought to have known that this was not the case;
7. His conduct as described in particulars 1 and/or 2 and/or 3 and/or 4 and/or 5 was sexually motivated
8. His conduct at allegation 6 was dishonest.

Mr Reene made no admissions in respect of the allegations but did provide a written statement addressing the allegations.

## Preliminary applications

### Application to proceed in the absence of the teacher

Mr Reene was not present nor was he represented at the hearing. The presenting officer made an application to proceed in the absence of Mr Reene.

The panel accepted the legal advice provided in relation to this application and took account of the various factors referred to it, as derived from the guidance set down in the case of *R v Jones [2003] 1 AC 1* (as considered and applied in subsequent cases, particularly *GMC v Adeogba*).

The panel was satisfied that the Notice of Proceedings had been sent to Mr Reene in accordance with the Teacher misconduct: Disciplinary procedures for the teaching profession May 2020 (the '2020 Procedures').

The panel concluded that Mr Reene's absence was voluntary and that he was aware that the matter would proceed in his absence. This was on the basis that Mr Reene was represented and his representative had confirmed that neither Mr Reene nor his representative would be in attendance at the hearing.

The panel noted that Mr Reene had not sought an adjournment to the hearing and the panel did not consider that an adjournment would procure his attendance at a hearing. There was no medical evidence before the panel that Mr Reene was unfit to attend the hearing.

The panel considered that it was in the public interest for the hearing to take place. It also considered the effect on the witnesses of any delay.

Having decided that it was appropriate to proceed, the panel agreed to seek to ensure that the proceedings were as fair as possible in the circumstances, bearing in mind that Mr Reene was neither present nor represented.

### Support for witness whilst giving evidence

Whilst no preliminary application was made in respect of this matter, the panel considered the submissions from the presenting officer in respect of a request from Mother A to have her husband (Child A's father – Father A) present during her evidence primarily to provide technical support. The presenting officer noted that Father A had been involved in the matter but was not being called as a witness and noted that there may be a perception of a conflict of interest through his attendance.

The panel determined that there would be little or no prejudice to the teacher, by Mother A having Father A present whilst she was giving evidence. The panel considered that being

able to see both Mother A and her husband, Father A, on camera whilst she was giving evidence would seek to mitigate any risk of communication between the two of them.

## Summary of evidence

### Documents

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

- Section 1: Chronology and list of key people – pages 5 to 7
- Section 2: Notice of hearing and response and statement of agreed facts – pages 8 to 21
- Section 3: TRA witness statements – pages 22 to 35
- Section 4: TRA documents – pages 36 to 402
- Section 5: Teacher documents – pages 403 to 532

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

### Witnesses

The panel heard oral evidence from the following witnesses called by the TRA:

- Mother of Child A – Mother A
- Witness B, [REDACTED]

## Decision and reasons

The panel announced its decision and reasons as follows:

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

On 1 September 1999, Mr Reene commenced employment as a teacher at Ratton School Academy Trust ('the School').

In January 2020, Mr Reene allegedly first began communicating with Child A.

On 21 June 2020, Mother A and Father A reported concerns regarding Mr Reene's communication with Child A to the police. No further action was taken.

On 14 August 2020, the Local Authority Designated Officer ('LADO') received information from Sussex police. As the School was closed for the summer, an evaluation meeting was held without the School's involvement.

On 2 September 2020 [REDACTED], contacted the [REDACTED], [REDACTED], to inform him of Mr Reene's online activity with Child A.

On 7 September 2020, the School held a virtual meeting with the LADO, [REDACTED], [REDACTED] for the School.

On 15 September 2020, Mr Reene was informed of the School's concerns and told that an investigation meeting would be held on 21 September 2020. The School also received information from an anonymous person regarding Mr Reene. In line with the School's safeguarding policy the information was referred to the LADO the same day.

On 17 September 2020, [REDACTED] received a phone call from the parent of Child A; this information was also referred to the LADO.

On 18 September 2020, the LADO informed the School that, due to the nature of the allegations, the information would need to be reviewed by Children's Social Care first, before the School would continue with its internal investigation.

On 6 and 13 October 2020, the School held an investigation meeting.

In January 2021, Witness B [REDACTED] met with Mr Reene to inform him that the investigation was complete and that the case would be referred to a disciplinary hearing.

On 24 February 2021, the School held a disciplinary hearing, and on 2 March 2021, the School sent an outcome letter to Mr Reene.

On 9 March 2021, the School received a notice of appeal from Mr Reene.

On 31 March 2021, the School held an appeal hearing and on 9 April Mr Reene was sent the outcome of this hearing.

On 4 May 2021, the School made a referral to the TRA.

In July 2022, Mr Reene resumed contact with Child A.

Mr Reene is now living abroad and teaching at a school in Malta.

## Findings of fact

The findings of fact are as follows:

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

- 1. You developed an inappropriate relationship with Child A.**
- 2. You sent inappropriate messages to Child A via WhatsApp and/or Twitch and/or TikTok, including:**
  - a. sending a heart emoji;**
  - b. sending a topless photo of yourself.**
- 3. You shared personal information about yourself with Child A including:**
  - a. Providing Child A with your personal telephone number;**
  - b. Informing Child A you were a teacher at Ratton School;**
  - c. Sending Child A a photo of yourself with your parents.**

The panel considered the oral evidence and witness statement of Witness B, [REDACTED].

Witness B stated that on 2 September 2020, [REDACTED] received a call from the LADO who alerted him of the concerns regarding Mr Reene and advised on steps to take.

He submitted that it was alleged Mr Reene had been communicating with Child A online, and that there were concerns raised around grooming. Witness B confirmed that Child A was not a child at the School or related to the School in any way.

Witness B submitted that he was appointed as the Investigating Officer, and a LADO meeting was held on 7 September 2020, where it was confirmed that the police were not taking any further action.

Witness B explained that, on 15 September 2020, he met with Mr Reene and informed him of the allegations made against him. Witness B stated that he met with Mr Reene on 13 and 22 October and 11 November 2020, and a disciplinary hearing was later held on 24 January 2021.

Witness B stated that in one of the photographs which Mr Reene had provided him with, he was topless and in another, he appeared to be drinking beer in his garden.

Witness B explained that Mr Reene stated that it was “*stupid*” of him to have sent a topless photograph of himself to a child, and that it was wrong to have sent a photograph of himself with alcohol. Witness B stated that Mr Reene said his intention when sending the messages and photographs was “*to help, provide guidance and support and be a*



*trusted and honest adult*". He stated that Mr Reene claimed he had a habit of sending photos to people.

Witness B explained that Mr Reene admitted using heart emojis but claimed the use of the heart emoji was him using random emojis which related to the sentence, such as smiling faces and hearts. Witness B stated that Mr Reene had said that he could see how this could be considered inappropriate, but he claimed that this was not his intention.

Witness B stated that Mr Reene said that he shared his phone number with Child A to make it clear who he was, and that he had also disclosed that he was a teacher at the School. Witness B stated that it would be *"highly unusual"* to identify yourself as an employee at the School to somebody who was unconnected to the School.

Witness B submitted that the messages Mr Reene had shown him were inappropriate in terms of tone and content, as Mr Reene referred to *"keeping things quiet"* or words to that effect. He also stated that by sending money and gifts to Child A, Mr Reene was in breach of the School's code of conduct.

In summary, Witness B submitted that Mr Reene's conduct was inappropriate and that in his view, *"this was a lonely man who exhibited behaviours with the hallmarks of grooming."* Witness B also stated that in his view, Mr Reene was, *"trying to forge an emotional connection with the child."*

Witness B stated that according to Mr Reene's training record, he had confirmed and signed as understood the relevant school policies (including the online safety policy 2020 and the Staff Behaviour Code of Conduct Policy 2022) and Keeping Children Safe in Education. Within his oral evidence, Witness B stated that Mr Reene had received additional safeguarding training and guidance in accordance with his needs.

Witness B stated that he had no communication with Child A's parents but said that the School did receive communication from two unknown individuals. These may have been Child A's parents. He stated that the School responded to the first communication by stating that they treat safeguarding matters seriously, and the second communication was a phone call to [REDACTED].

The panel considered the oral evidence and witness statement of Mother A, who they considered to be a reliable and credible witness.

Mother A stated that she first became aware of Mr Reene when she learned that he was communicating with [REDACTED] Child A via various social media platforms in 2020.

Mother A stated that she and her husband, Father A, looked at the messages between Child A and Mr Reene, and noticed that Mr Reene had sent Child A photographs. These included a photo of himself with his arm around a student in a classroom and texts with 'kisses', which Mother A deemed inappropriate.

Mother A stated that she and Father A realised Mr Reene was a teacher after googling his name, and stated that they were especially concerned due to the fact [REDACTED].

Mother A stated that they spoke to the police on 21 June 2020, and Child A attended an interview with a specialist police team and a worker from Barnardos, a children's charity.

Mother A stated that she and Father A began responding to messages from Mr Reene "on behalf of Child A", and decided to take action in September 2020 as communication was still ongoing. They were concerned about the ongoing communications as Child A was [REDACTED].

Mother A explained that Father A contacted Mr Reene on 5 September 2020, via WhatsApp, as communication between Child A and Mr Reene was ongoing.

Mother A asked Mr Reene to stop communicating with Child A. She stated that Mr Reene responded the same day, apologising and stating that his intention was not to be "predatory or manipulative". Following this, Mother A stated that they blocked Mr Reene from Child A's phone.

Mother A submitted that on the 6 September 2020, they contacted Child A's school and separately reported their concerns to [REDACTED] at the college which Child A was attending.

Mother A stated they reported their concerns to the School Mr Reene taught at, on 15 September 2020, and spoke with [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] on the phone. She stated that the (East) Sussex LADO, for the area where Mr Reene was based, contacted her on the 17 September 2020 with regards to the concerns. They confirmed that Child A's school had been in contact with them, and that the concerns were referred to the Scottish police.

Mother A stated that they "decided to sell [their] home and relocate to a different part of [REDACTED]... as Christopher Reene knew our address." Mother A continued, "we did this to protect the safety of Child A, as well as that of our family as we did not know whether Christopher Reene was potentially dangerous or what he might be capable of."

Mother A explained that in July 2022 Child A [REDACTED]. She explained that Child A [REDACTED] and Father A noticed a WhatsApp message from Mr Reene on Child A's phone.

Mother A stated that Father A read the message on Child A's phone and found messages from Mr Reene dated 31 January 2022. This was after he had given assurances that he would cease communications with Child A in 2020. These messages stated that he was nervous speaking to Child A and he "might be banned from teaching". Mother A explained that they suspected they had been communicating via email as well

as Mr Reene had asked Child A whether they had read his last email. Mother A reported that Mr Reene sent Child A money for [REDACTED], and asked if he could voice call.

Mother A stated that on 15 October 2022, Father A sent Mr Reene message asking him to not contact Child A. She further submitted that she contacted the school in Malta which Mr Reene was teaching at to inform them. She also contacted the LADO again on 20 October 2022.

The panel considered the written witness evidence of Mr Reene.

Mr Reene explained that he was on several social media platforms, [REDACTED] and viewed someone (Child A) [REDACTED], to which he wrote a short message of 'congratulations' and 'liked' the video. He stated he had no idea who the person was, but he [REDACTED] so left a comment.

Mr Reene submitted that Child A replied to his comment. Mr Reene reported "*feeling starstruck*" and sent them a private message. Mr Reene stated that he realised Child A was [REDACTED]. Mr Reene stated that he immediately informed Child A of his age and profession, to prevent Child A thinking anything untoward, to which Child A said they were used to talking with adults.

Mr Reene explained that with his [REDACTED] he remained in contact with Child A as they gave him support and comfort. He stated that he should have cut ties with Child A.

Mr Reene submitted that he does not agree with the term 'inappropriate relationship', as his whole life has been about "*talking to young people on their level*", and he treated Child A with the same level of respect he gave to every student.

He explained that at the School, "*we have all had students who have remained in contact with us from leaving school at age sixteen to becoming adults.*" Mr Reene further submitted that, "*many teachers, who are also parents of children at the school, have out-of-school encounters with their children's' friends, who are also students, attending family parties, sleep-overs and other such activities. Is the only difference here that I am single, middle-aged, and lived with my parents, so must be considered automatically to be of danger of any young people?*"

Mr Reene submitted that Child A asked for his support with their Twitch account. Mr Reene stated that he has always tried to support young people in their pursuits because encouragement in their teenage years is important. He stated that he shared several pieces of private information with Child A which made his identity obvious, and stated that he was trying to remain as open and honest as possible, and was assured by Child A that their parents were aware of him. Mr Reene further stated that he was not drunk when communicating with Child A.

Mr Reene explained that most of the photos he sent to Child A were of his gardening attempts and Lego models. He stated that if the issue with the photo he sent Child A holding alcohol was that they were underage, he questions teachers at the School Prom drinking in front of students.

Mr Reene explained that he sent the topless photo to Child A as a joke as he had had a haircut but does not have much hair. He stated that there is nothing sexual or suggestive about the photo, and that he has met students topless at the swimming pool so does not deem the photo inappropriate.

Mr Reene submitted that he felt Witness B was digging during the investigation process, and that he was "*horrified*" of Witness B's suggestion that he was sending nude photos to anyone. He stated that when he was called into Witness B's office to discuss investigative meetings, Witness B ended with words to the effect of, "*Let's see how this affects your future career in teaching*". Mr Reene stated that Witness B had made his mind up about the outcome of the process before he even had a chance to speak. He also stated that Witness B has accused him of lying, and that this is "*far from the truth*".

The panel noted the documents that were gathered and considered as part of the School's investigation as well as the documents exhibited by Mother A and Mr Reene which showed screenshots of messages between Mr Reene and Child A.

In respect of allegation 1, the panel considered the evidence before it, including both the documentary evidence and that of witnesses. The panel considered that the original interaction between Mr Reene and Child A, being a like and comment on a viral [REDACTED] video, was not inappropriate. However, the panel considered that following this original interaction, and notwithstanding that it had become apparent to Mr Reene that Child A was [REDACTED], Mr Reene sought to forge an emotional connection with Child A over a period of time, which was wholly inappropriate.

The panel considered that there were a number of factors which contributed to the finding that the relationship was inappropriate. In particular, the panel considered that the tone, frequency and context of the messages sent by Mr Reene sought to create a trusting relationship. The panel considered that this was demonstrated by Mr Reene sharing his bank details with Child A and also by a number of Mr Reene's messages which the panel considered sought to present himself as a "victim" by exposing his own vulnerabilities or seeking to flatter Child A. The panel considered that this amounted to manipulation by Mr Reene.

The panel was mindful of the imbalance in power between Child A and Mr Reene and the considerable age gap that they had. The panel further considered that this imbalance in power was reinforced by the gifts and financial payments made by Mr Reene which the panel felt may have had the effect of motivating Child A to continue the relationship.

The panel was also mindful that this was a relationship which had continued against Child A's parents' direct wishes and that Mr Reene had been asked to desist from communicating with Child A.

The panel noted that Child A may have contacted Mr Reene first in 2022 but that it was both inappropriate for Mr Reene to respond and also to respond in the manner that he did (which included informing Child A that he may be "*banned from teaching*"), which may have been perceived to elicit guilt from Child A.

The panel was aware that the relationship coincided with the Covid 19 pandemic in 2020 and this may have exacerbated [REDACTED]. The panel felt that Mr Reene exploited this [REDACTED] by striking up an intimate relationship and plying Child A with regular gifts of money and by making regular contact with frequent occasions of inappropriate messaging, use of emojis and language e.g. hearts, kisses and swearing.

In respect of allegation 2, the panel was satisfied, having been provided with screenshots of the messages and photos sent by Mr Reene, that these had regularly contained heart emojis and expressions of love. The panel also found that he had sent a topless photo of himself.

Whilst the panel was mindful that some of the messages sent by Mr Reene were not inappropriate in and of themselves, the panel considered that the messages referred to within allegation 2, and indeed many other messages, given the context, were inappropriate. The panel was particularly mindful of the times and frequency of the messages being sent and noted that many of these were sent very late at night or early in the morning.

In respect of allegation 3, the panel was satisfied that Mr Reene had shared personal information with Child A, which included his personal telephone number, that he worked at Ratton School and a photo of himself with his parents. The panel considered that this was inappropriate, not least as it was in breach of the school's online safety and safeguarding policies.

Accordingly, on the balance of probabilities, the panel found allegations 1 to 3 proven.

- 4. You sent monies to the value of approximately £700 to Child A including:**
  - a. In the form of 'Bits' (an e-gaming currency) paid via Child A's Twitch account and/or;**
  - b. Via PayPal**
  
- 5. You sent one or more gifts to Child A via post including:**
  - a. two hats and/or a drinks bottle;**

Mother A stated that in June 2020, Child A received a parcel in the post for [REDACTED] which was addressed to them in handwriting. She stated that Child A opened the parcel which contained a baseball cap and explained that the gift was from Mr Reene, “a middle-aged man who [they] had been communicating with online”.

She explained that Child A informed her that Mr Reene contacted them in January 2020, after a [REDACTED]. Mr Reene had ‘liked’ the video on the app and sent them £10 via PayPal to put towards their next video.

Mother A stated that throughout the time Mr Reene was in contact with Child A, he had sent them £748.38 via PayPal. She further submitted in her oral evidence that these were the payments that she and her husband had been able to trace and that there may be others.

The panel considered the witness statement of Mr Reene.

Mr Reene stated that he gave Child A money via PayPal to support [REDACTED] business, but stated he became “too generous”. Mr Reene further referred to his “silly generosity”.

The panel considered that Mr Reene’s evidence in respect of the gifts he had provided was inconsistent as he stated, “I did send some gifts – a hat [not two!] and some energy drink paraphernalia. Many of the streamers, I learnt, have their own merchandise. I thought it would be nice for [them] to have the same, so I got a couple of baseball caps with [their] ‘name’”.

Mr Reene explained that he spent money as a teacher on gifts for his students, and just wanted to support in any way he could. He stated that his generosity may seem suspicious to Witness B and Mother A, but it is something he has always done.

The panel considered screenshots of Child A’s PayPal account which showed frequent and significant payments being made by Mr Reene to Child A. The panel noted in particular that Mr Reene had made substantial payments of £95 and £160 with the reference, “Happy [REDACTED] Birthday”. The payments appeared to escalate over time, increasing in frequency and amount with several payments being made in the same day. The panel also noted that there appeared to be payments made from Child A to Mr Reene which the panel considered to be concerning.

The panel also noted that Mr Reene accepted that he had sent Child A gifts via post, stating that “the [REDACTED] felt comfortable giving [their] details to people [they] trusted I believed”.

The panel considered that it was wholly inappropriate to be making payments of this amount to a child and did not consider Mr Reene’s explanation (that these were gifts made altruistically or to support Child A’s venture) to be satisfactory.

Accordingly on the balance of probabilities, the panel found allegations 4 and 5 proven.

**6. On 6 October 2020, at the first investigation meeting, you told Individual A that you had deleted all evidence of your communication with Child A when you knew or ought to have known that this was not the case;**

The panel considered the witness evidence of Witness B.

Witness B submitted that during the first investigatory meeting on 6 October 2020, Mr Reene stated that he had deleted all messages he had with Child A. However, Witness B stated that at the second investigatory meeting on 13 October 2020, Mr Reene was able to produce paper copies of some of those communications. Witness B stated within his oral evidence that his view was that Mr Reene, *“was not being wholly truthful when he said he was unable to access messages.”*

The panel considered the witness statement of Mr Reene.

Mr Reene stated that, *“neither Witness B’s lack of understanding of technology, nor mine, makes me a liar. I had deleted the apps from my mobile phone and laptop by putting them in the bin. To me they were out of sight, out of mind and gone. When the need arose to find the ‘heads up’ comment from [REDACTED], I was told by friends that if I simply reinstall an app on my phone, then I could use my login details to access the account.”*

The panel considered that Mr Reene’s actions throughout the period to which the allegations relate demonstrated a degree of technical proficiency which was not consistent with his contention that he had a lack of understanding of technology. For example, Mr Reene was using a number of platforms including Twitch, TikTok and PayPal throughout the period to which the allegations relate.

The panel noted that whilst Mr Reene had stated that the messages had been deleted in his first meeting, he was then able to produce a select number of the messages in hard copy within his second meeting. The panel determined that what was ultimately provided to the School by Mr Reene was not a full and transparent record of the messages.

On the balance of probabilities, the panel considered that Mr Reene knew or ought to have known that he had not deleted all evidence of his communication with Child A, and therefore found allegation 6 proven.

**7. Your conduct as described in particulars 1 and/or 2 and/or 3 and/or 4 and/or 5 was sexually motivated.**

The panel considered the witness statement of Mr Reene.

Mr Reene wanted to make it known that when the incident was under investigation, he was never monitored or removed from the classroom, showing he was still trusted.

Mr Reene stated that his mantra is *“not to harm but to protect”* and stated that *“to say safeguarding is not important to me is, quite frankly, untrue and offensive.”* He explained that it saddens him to think that forming a positive close relationship with any young person is now seen as *“unsavoury or unprofessional”*, when it is far from this.

Mr Reene stated that his ‘motives’ were in no way *“sexual or predatory”*. He stated that he would like it noted that the contact in 2022 was initiated by Child A, who at the time was [REDACTED]. Mr Reene explained that Child A wanted to know he was okay and shared that they missed him, so Mr Reene felt it was appropriate to reply. He stated that he felt this especially as Child A was, *“a mature [REDACTED] with leadership skills beyond [their] years”*. The panel noted that this was in contrast to Mother A’s opinion of [REDACTED].

Mr Reene explained that when Mother A and Father A contacted him they did so in the guise of a “catfish”, and used a WhatsApp profile picture of a young girl in fishnet tights, who he stated he believes is [REDACTED]. Mr Reene submitted that the profile image then changed, but stated that if Mother A and Father A had an issue with him, it was peculiar to be showing him this young girl dressed in something ‘slutty’.

The panel’s attention was drawn to section 78 *Sexual Offences Act 2003* and to the cases of *Sait v The General Medical Council [2018]*, *Basson v General Medical Council [2018]* and *The General Medical Council v Haris [2020] EWHC 2518*.

The panel noted that in *Basson* it was stated that *“A sexual motive means that the conduct was done either in pursuit of sexual gratification or in pursuit of a sexual relationship”*.

The panel further noted that in *General Medical Council v Haris [2021] EWCA Civ 763*, it was stated that, *“In the absence of a plausible innocent explanation for what he did, the facts spoke for themselves. A sexual motive was plainly more likely than not; I would go so far as to say that that inference was overwhelming.”*

The panel therefore considered whether a plausible innocent explanation for the conduct which they had found proven at allegations 1 to 5 had been demonstrated by Mr Reene.

The panel considered carefully the explanations provided by Mr Reene, that this was a platonic friendship. The panel also noted that Mr Reene accepted (within his disciplinary interviews) that his conduct was inappropriate. Further Mr Reene stated that he could appreciate how his conduct may be perceived as grooming according to the KCSIE/NSPCC definitions. However, despite this, he maintained that he was not grooming Child A and did not want anything from them.



The panel did not consider that the explanations offered by Mr Reene amounted to a “plausible innocent explanation”. The panel noted that there were a number of factors within the contact between Mr Reene and Child A which were akin to an intimate emotional relationship. This included the timing of the messages, being very late at night and early in the morning, the persistent nature of the messages, very complimentary and flattering messages from Mr Reene and, in places, the use of language which could be perceived to be as flirtatious such as, “*That goes in the secrets box eh? You’re a naughty little [REDACTED] lol*”.

The panel was also mindful that Mother A had submitted within her evidence that Mr Reene had given Child A access to his bank account which the panel considered was symptomatic of an intimate relationship.

The panel did not consider that all of the individual messages or incidents of alleged misconduct amounted to conduct which was sexually motivated. However, after careful consideration of the persistence and cumulative nature of the messages and the ongoing relationship between Mr Reene and Child A, the panel concluded that on the balance of probabilities, and in the absence of a plausible innocent explanation, Mr Reene’s conduct was sexually motivated.

#### **8. Your conduct as set out in allegation 6 was dishonest.**

Having found allegation 6 proven, the panel went on to consider whether the conduct found proven was dishonest.

The panel considered the character references that Mr Reene had provided, which the panel deemed may be relevant to this allegation, both in terms of Mr Reene’s credibility and propensity to commit the conduct alleged.

However, the panel did not give significant weight to these statements as it was not clear whether the individuals providing them had been made aware of the context or allegations and in any event the panel considered that the character references were neutral.

In reaching its decision on dishonesty, the panel considered the case of *Ivey v Genting Casinos (UK) Ltd t/a Crockford*.

The panel firstly sought to ascertain the actual state of Mr Reene’s knowledge or belief as to the facts. On the balance of probabilities and for the reasons set out above, the panel was not satisfied that in Mr Reene’s mind he believed he had deleted the messages.

Given the panel’s finding as to Mr Reene’s state of mind, the panel considered that his conduct had been dishonest according to the objective standards of ordinary decent people.

The panel further considered that had Mr Reene deleted the evidence of his conversations with Child A as he contended he had, this also would have been dishonest in circumstances where the conversations themselves amounted to misconduct.

Accordingly, the panel found allegation 8 proven.

The panel found allegations 1 to 8 proven.

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

Having found 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'.

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

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

The panel was satisfied that the conduct of Mr Reene amounted to misconduct of a serious nature which fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession.

The panel also considered whether Mr Reene's conduct displayed behaviours associated with any of the offences listed on pages 12 and 13 of the Advice.

The panel found that the offence of sexual communication with a child was potentially relevant because the panel considered the conduct found proven to be sexually motivated. The Advice indicates that where behaviours associated with such an offence exist, a panel is more likely to conclude that an individual's conduct would amount to unacceptable professional conduct.

The panel noted that although allegations 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7 took place outside the education setting, they were relevant to Mr Reene's role as a teacher as he was sending inappropriate messages, monies and gifts to a school age child, [REDACTED], and the panel found that this conduct was sexually motivated.

In addition, the panel considered that Mr Reene had behaved dishonestly throughout the investigation into the conduct in that he had not been forthcoming, open and transparent in providing the evidence and he had consistently sought to minimise and deflect from his conduct rather than engaging in the process.

Accordingly, the panel was satisfied that Mr Reene was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct.

The panel took into account the way the teaching profession is viewed by others 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 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, potentially damaging the public perception.

The panel therefore found that Mr Reene's actions constituted conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

Having found the facts of allegations 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 proved, the panel further found that Mr Reene's conduct amounted to both unacceptable professional conduct and 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 should be made, the panel had to consider whether it would be an appropriate and proportionate measure, and whether it would be in the public interest to do so.

The panel was aware that 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 and the protection of other members of the public; the maintenance of public confidence in the profession; declaring and upholding proper standards of conduct; and that prohibition strikes the right balance between the rights of the teacher and the public interest, if they are in conflict.

In light of the panel's findings against Mr Reene, which involved sending inappropriate messages, monies and gifts and sharing personal information about himself with a child which the panel found to be sexually motivated, there was a strong public interest consideration in the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils and the protection of other members of the public.

Similarly, the panel considered that public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Mr Reene 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 Reene was outside that which could reasonably be tolerated.

In view of the clear public interest considerations that were present, the panel considered carefully whether or not it would be proportionate to impose a prohibition order, taking into account the effect that this would have on Mr Reene. The panel was mindful of the need to strike the right balance between the rights of the teacher and the public interest.

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

- serious departure from the personal and professional conduct elements of the Teachers' Standards;
- abuse of position or trust (particularly involving pupils);

- any 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;
- failure to act on evidence that indicated a child's welfare may have been at risk e.g. failed to notify the designated safeguarding lead and/or make a referral to children's social care, the police or other relevant agencies when abuse, neglect and/or harmful cultural practices were identified; failure in their duty of care towards a child, including exposing a child to risk or failing to promote the safety and welfare of the children (as set out in Part 1 of KCSIE);
- a deep-seated attitude that leads to harmful behaviour;
- 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;
- collusion of concealment including:
  - failure to challenge inappropriate actions, defending inappropriate actions or concealing inappropriate actions;
  - lying to prevent the identification of wrongdoing;

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

There was no evidence that Mr Reene's actions were not deliberate.

There was no evidence to suggest that Mr Reene was acting under extreme duress, and in fact the panel found Mr Reene's actions to be calculated and motivated.

There was no evidence that Mr Reene demonstrated exceptionally high standards in both personal and professional conduct and has contributed significantly to the education sector. Whilst the panel did note the character references provided by Mr Reene which showed that some parents thought highly of him, they considered that the misconduct was so serious that these did not outweigh the very serious safeguarding failings.

The panel noted Mr Reene's witness statement, where he stated that in the future he would ensure he kept a professional and respectful distance from young people, making

boundaries clear and non-questionable. He submitted that he has learnt a “*harsh life-long lesson*” and does not intend on repeating this at all.

Mr Reene also stated that the School provided no duty of care, in that they should have realised his [REDACTED] could have had an effect on his performance and well-being, but it was ignored. He stated that this “*hurt*” him having been at the School over 20 years, and that he had to “*carry on strong and as normal*”. Mr Reene explained that during one of his investigative meetings, he mentioned his [REDACTED] to which he was offered a number to call, but he was offered no in-house support.

[REDACTED]. Mr Reene submitted that using Twitch was an escapism for him, [REDACTED]. He stated that he realises sharing private information was foolish. [REDACTED].

Mr Reene emphasised that he will “*never give support to a young person online in this way again*”, and that he no longer uses the Twitch platform.

Mr Reene stated that he does not want to lose the opportunity to work with young people in the future as he feels he has a lot to offer.

However, the panel considered Mr Reene’s submissions but then, after careful deliberation, determined that these did not show any insight or remorse for his actions. The panel was concerned to note that the statement he had provided sought to minimise and normalise the misconduct and the continued breaches of the School’s ethos and policies, for example by calling his conduct “*silly*”, and detract from his own actions by discrediting other members of staff within the School and indeed Child A’s parents.

The panel did not consider that Mr Reene had demonstrated sufficient transparency or honesty throughout the School’s investigation and procedures, values which the panel consider are vital to a teacher’s role, particularly in respect of safeguarding and online safety.

The panel had significant concerns that there was a high risk of reoccurrence of the conduct set out in the allegations, as Mr Reene did not accept that there was anything wrong in the relationship he had formed with a child. The panel also noted that Mr Reene continued contact with Child A in 2022, even after he was aware of the referral to TRA and following specific requests from Child A’s parents to cease communication. The panel was also aware that Mr Reene apparently did not take on board or act upon the school’s additional safeguarding training and guidance provided to him as a result of his additional needs. Mr Reene stated that he considered the additional training - conduct counselling - was “*laughable*”.

The panel found that Mr Reene had sought to justify his behaviour throughout his statement, dismissing the seriousness of the allegations against him. At one point Mr Reene sought to minimise the seriousness of the allegation regarding a topless photo by

stating, *“I don’t believe the readership of The Sun newspaper would have been what it was had the models showed this level of toplessness on page 3”*. Mr Reene celebrated what he perceived was a *“maverick attitude”* but the panel found this to amount to a fundamental misappreciation for the importance of safeguarding.

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, particularly in circumstances where the conduct was found to be sexually motivated and which constituted an abuse of a position of trust. 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 Reene 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 Reene. The fact that Mr Reene had not demonstrated any recognition or appreciation for the severity of his actions or the impact upon Child A and their family was a significant factor in forming that opinion. Accordingly, the panel made a recommendation to the Secretary of State that a prohibition order should be imposed with immediate effect.

The panel went on to consider whether or not it would be appropriate 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 behaviours that, if proved, would militate against the recommendation of a review period. One such factor is any sexual misconduct involving a child.

The Advice also indicates that there are behaviours that, if proved, would have greater relevance and weigh in favour of a longer review period.

The panel found that Mr Reene’s behaviour in his communications with Child A was sexually motivated. Whilst the panel was mindful that the police did not take any further action in respect of this matter, the panel determined that the conduct as found proven could potentially amount to sexual misconduct involving a child.

The panel noted that in any event the list of behaviours provided within the Advice was not exhaustive.

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

## **Decision and reasons on behalf of the Secretary of State**

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

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

In this case, the panel has found all of the allegations proven and found that those proven facts amount to unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

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

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

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

The panel finds that the conduct of Mr Reene fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession.

The findings of misconduct are particularly serious as they include findings which involved sending inappropriate messages, monies and gifts and sharing personal information with a child, conduct found to be sexually motivated.



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 Reene, 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/or safeguard pupils. The panel has observed, "In light of the panel's findings against Mr Reene, which involved sending inappropriate messages, monies and gifts and sharing personal information about himself with a child which the panel found to be sexually motivated, there was a strong public interest consideration in the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils and the protection of other members of the public." 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, "Mr Reene emphasised that he will *"never give support to a young person online in this way again"*, and that he no longer uses the Twitch platform." The panel has also commented "However, the panel considered Mr Reene's submissions but then, after careful deliberation, determined that these did not show any insight or remorse for his actions. The panel was concerned to note that the statement he had provided sought to minimise and normalise the misconduct and the continued breaches of the School's ethos and policies, for example by calling his conduct *"silly"*, and detract from his own actions by discrediting other members of staff within the School and indeed Child A's parents." 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, "the panel considered that public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Mr Reene was not treated with the utmost seriousness when regulating the conduct of the profession." I am particularly mindful of the finding of sexually motivated conduct 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 and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, 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 Reene himself and the panel comment “Mr Reene stated that he does not want to lose the opportunity to work with young people in the future as he feels he has a lot to offer.” The panel went on to say “There was no evidence that Mr Reene demonstrated exceptionally high standards in both personal and professional conduct and has contributed significantly to the education sector. Whilst the panel did note the character references provided by Mr Reene which showed that some parents thought highly of him, they considered that the misconduct was so serious that these did not outweigh the very serious safeguarding failings.”

A prohibition order would prevent Mr Reene from teaching. A prohibition order 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 comment “The panel found that Mr Reene had sought to justify his behaviour throughout his statement, dismissing the seriousness of the allegations against him. At one point Mr Reene sought to minimise the seriousness of the allegation regarding a topless photo by stating, *“I don’t believe the readership of The Sun newspaper would have been what it was had the models showed this level of toplessness on page 3”*. Mr Reene celebrated what he perceived was a *“maverick attitude”* but the panel found this to amount to a fundamental misappreciation for the importance of safeguarding.”

I have also placed considerable weight on the finding “The panel had significant concerns that there was a high risk of reoccurrence of the conduct set out in the allegations, as Mr Reene did not accept that there was anything wrong in the relationship he had formed with a child. The panel also noted that Mr Reene continued contact with Child A in 2022, even after he was aware of the referral to TRA and following specific requests from Child A’s parents to cease communication. The panel was also aware that Mr Reene apparently did not take on board or act upon the school’s additional safeguarding training and guidance provided to him as a result of his additional needs. Mr Reene stated that he considered the additional training - conduct counselling - was *“laughable”*.”

I have given less weight in my consideration of sanction therefore, to the contribution that Mr Reene 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 Advice indicates that there are behaviours that, if proved, would militate against the recommendation of a review period. One such factor is any sexual misconduct involving a child." The panel has also said "The panel found that Mr Reene's behaviour in his communications with Child A was sexually motivated. Whilst the panel was mindful that the police did not take any further action in respect of this matter, the panel determined that the conduct as found proven could potentially amount to sexual misconduct involving a child."

In this case, factors mean that allowing a review period is not sufficient to achieve the aim of maintaining public confidence in the profession. These elements are the seriousness of the findings, the lack of full insight or remorse and the risk of repetition.

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 Christopher Reene 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 Reene 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 Reene 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: Sarah Buxcey**

**Date: 5 December 2023**

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