



Teaching  
Regulation  
Agency

# **Miss Robyn Hedges: Professional conduct panel outcome**

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

**June 2024**

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

**Teacher:** Miss Robyn Hedges

**Teacher ref number:** 1751673

**Teacher date of birth:** 15 July 1994

**TRA reference:** 22347

**Date of determination:** 25 June 2024

**Former employer:** [REDACTED]

### **Introduction**

A professional conduct panel (“the panel”) of the Teaching Regulation Agency (“the TRA”) convened on 24 to 25 June 2024 by way of a virtual hearing, to consider the case of Miss Robyn Hedges.

The panel members were Mrs Shabana Robertson (lay panellist – in the chair), Ms Sarah Daniel (lay panellist) and Mrs Julie Wells (teacher panellist).

The legal adviser to the panel was Mr Ben Schofield of Blake Morgan LLP.

The presenting officer for the TRA was Ms Charlotte Watts of Brown Jacobson LLP.

Miss Hedges was not present and was not represented.

The hearing took place in public and was recorded.

## Allegations

The panel considered the allegations set out in the notice of hearing dated 15 March 2024.

It was alleged that Miss Hedges was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute in that whilst employed as a Class Teacher at [REDACTED]:

1. She engaged in inappropriate relationships and/or failed to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with one or more pupils, in that she:

a. communicated with one or more pupils via social media between or around February 2023 and May 2023;

b. engaged in discussions with Pupil A in relation to:

i. underwear;

ii. relationships;

iii. shaving;

iv. body piercings;

v. vaping;

c. met Pupil A and/or Pupil B outside of the School's premises.

2. She sought to conceal her contact with Pupil A by:

a. asking Pupil A to wait to communicate with her while her accounts were being monitored or a comment to this effect;

b. deleting messages which she had sent to Pupil A;

c. misleading the school as to the nature and extent of her communication with one or more pupils.

3. Her conduct as may be found proven at Allegation 2 above lacked integrity and/or was dishonest.

4. She failed to take appropriate action and/or ensure appropriate action was taken with respect to safeguarding disclosure concerning Pupil A, in that she did not make disclosures to the Designated Safeguarding Lead when she became aware that Pupil A:

- a. had stated that she and/others had been vaping;
- b. had disclosed that they had kissed another individual for money.

In a signed statement of agreed facts dated 4 June 2024, Miss Hedges admitted the allegations in full and further admitted that they would amount to unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that would bring the profession into disrepute.

## Preliminary applications

### Application to proceed in the absence of Miss Hedges

The panel considered an application from the presenting officer to proceed in the absence of Miss Hedges.

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*; *GMC v Visvardis* [2016] EWCA Civ 162).

The panel was satisfied that the notice of hearing ("the Notice") had been sent in accordance with paragraph 5.23 and 5.24 of the Teacher Misconduct: Disciplinary Procedures for the Teaching Profession 2020 ("the Procedures") and that the requirements for service had been satisfied.

Miss Hedges was clearly aware of the hearing and had responded to the Notice, confirming that she will not be attending.

The panel went on to consider whether to proceed in Miss Hedges' absence or to adjourn, in accordance with paragraph 5.47 of the Procedures.

The panel had regard to the fact that its discretion to continue in the absence of a teacher should be exercised with great caution and with close regard to the overall fairness of the proceedings. The panel gave careful consideration to the fact that Miss Hedges was not in attendance and would not be represented at this hearing should it proceed, and the extent of the disadvantage to her as a consequence.

Given the express confirmation from Miss Hedges that she was not going to attend, the panel concluded that the hearing should proceed. The panel was satisfied that Miss Hedges' absence was voluntary, and she had waived her right to attend. There was no indication that Miss Hedges might attend at a future date such that no purpose would be served by an adjournment. The panel also took account of the fact that there is a public interest in hearings taking place within a reasonable time.

Having decided that it is appropriate to proceed, the panel would strive to ensure that the proceedings are as fair as possible in the circumstances, bearing in mind that Miss Hedges would be neither present nor represented.

### **Application to admit late documents**

The presenting officer made an application to admit a late document into the evidence. The document was a 9-page statement of agreed facts between the TRA and Miss Hedges. The presenting officer submitted that as the document contained Miss Hedges' position on each of the allegations, it was a document that was plainly relevant to these proceedings. Furthermore, as it was a document prepared in collaboration with Miss Hedges, there would be no material unfairness arising by admitting the document.

The panel agreed with the submissions made by the presenting officer and was satisfied that it would be relevant and fair to admit a statement of agreed facts into the proceedings.

### **Application for privacy**

Miss Hedges made a written application for the entirety of the hearing to be held in private and for restrictions on the information that is published on the TRA's website.

Miss Hedges' application centred on the impact these proceedings would have on a third party. [REDACTED].

The presenting officer opposed the application and submitted the panel should not move away from the starting point of public hearing and highlighted there were other lesser measures the panel could consider in lieu of holding the entirety of the hearing in private.

The panel noted that the decision on what will or will not be published into the public domain in any written determination was a matter for the Secretary of State's decision maker and not a matter for the panel. Accordingly, the panel's decision related solely to the hearing itself. The panel took into account the guidance from its legal adviser, which was that the law said that only in exceptional circumstances should a panel sit entirely in private when it was suggested the proceedings may have a significant adverse effect on a third party. Whilst the panel wholly understood why Miss Hedges would seek to protect a third party [REDACTED], the panel considered that the evidence before it was insufficient to reach the high bar set by the legal guidance.

The panel did give further consideration to other options, such as directing that the School should not be named during the hearing, but as there was no oral evidence to be considered at this hearing, such measures would have no practical effect.

Accordingly, the panel refused the application.

## Summary of evidence

### Documents

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

Section 1: Indexing and anonymised pupil list – pages 1 to 5

Section 2: Notice of hearing and response – pages 6 to 21

Section 3: Teaching Regulation Agency witness statements – pages 21 to 33

Section 4: Teaching Regulation Agency documents – pages 34 to 375

Section 5: Teacher documents – pages 376 to 380

In addition, the panel agreed to admit the 9-page statement of agreed facts.

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

### Witnesses

No witnesses were called to give oral evidence at the hearing.

## Decision and reasons

The panel announced its decision and reasons as follows:

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

Miss Hedges was employed at [REDACTED] (“the School”) from [REDACTED]. At the material time of the allegations, Miss Hedges was a [REDACTED] class teacher.

Pupil A was [REDACTED] and a pupil at the School in [REDACTED] but was taught by a different teacher. On 12 May 2023, Pupil A’s mother and grandmother attended the School to discuss an urgent issue. They met with Individual A [REDACTED], the School’s [REDACTED], and explained that they discovered a number of interactions between Pupil A and Miss Hedges, via private messaging on Instagram. They provided 187 screenshots they had taken to Individual B [REDACTED], covering February to May 2023.

The School made a referral to the Local Authority Designated Officer, who in turn informed the police. Various investigations were initiated by these bodies and Miss Hedges was suspended from her teaching position. During this process it also came to light that Miss Hedges had been in contact with other pupils, particularly Pupil B, who

was a pupil in her class. Following the police's decision that no criminal offences appeared to have been committed, the School's own investigation process resumed. Miss Hedges resigned from her position on 7 July 2023, during the School's ongoing investigatory process. At the conclusion of the School's investigation, Individual B [REDACTED] made a referral to the TRA, which has resulted in this hearing.

In the evidence before the panel was a written statement prepared for these proceedings by Individual B [REDACTED], who was also asked by the TRA to attend this hearing to give oral evidence in the event that the panel had any questions. In light of the statement of agreed facts being admitted into the evidence, the panel did not have any questions of Individual B [REDACTED] and she was therefore not called on to give oral evidence at the hearing.

Whilst Miss Hedges admitted each and every allegation in full in the statement of agreed facts, the panel still carefully considered if those admissions were unequivocal and if they were consistent with the surrounding evidence available to the panel.

## **Findings of fact**

The findings of fact are as follows:

### **1. You engaged in inappropriate relationships and/or failed to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with one or more pupils, in that you:**

#### **a. communicated with one or more pupils via social media between or around February 2023 and May 2023;**

In deciding on allegation 1, the panel firstly considered the factual basis for each sub-allegation and then further considered whether it amounted to being engaged in an inappropriate relationship and/or a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with pupils. The panel considered there was no material difference between these two concepts in the context of this case and accordingly, any finding of there being an inappropriate relationship with a pupil, would also amount to a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries.

In the statement of agreed facts, Miss Hedges admitted this sub-allegation. The statement set out the admissions in the following terms:

“Miss Hedges accepts that she sent messages to Pupil A via social media between February and May 2023. Miss Hedges accepts that by doing so, she engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil A and that she had failed to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with Pupil A.

Miss Hedges accepts that the messages that she exchanged with Pupil A took place between 20 February 2023 until 9 May 2023.



Miss Hedges also accepts that she sent private messages via social media to Pupil B. As a result of this admission, Miss Hedges accepts that she engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil B and that she had failed to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with Pupil B.

Miss Hedges accepts that her messages with Pupil B commenced on or around 2 March 2023.”

Before the panel were near 200 hundred screenshots from Pupil A’s Instagram account. Although there was no direct evidence of any messages between Miss Hedges and Pupil B, the panel noted that in the School’s investigation report, it was noted that Pupil B had said he had deleted all of the messages.

The panel was therefore satisfied that Miss Hedges’ admission to this factual sub-allegation was consistent with the surrounding evidence. The panel further considered that Miss Hedges’ admissions in the statement of agreed facts was unequivocal.

In considering the appropriateness of such contact, the panel was satisfied there was a clear professional obligation on Miss Hedges not to engage in private online communications with pupils. That position is made clear throughout all teaching training processes, ongoing professional training and is an inherent element of the Teachers’ Standards. Furthermore, such actions were in breach of the requirements set out in the School’s own code of conduct which Miss Hedges had signed as being understood. The panel was satisfied that such communications amounted to a plain failure of this obligation to maintain appropriate boundaries.

Accordingly, the panel found Allegation 1a proved.

**b. engaged in discussions with Pupil A in relation to:**

In the statement of agreed facts, Miss Hedges admitted this sub-allegation. The statement set out the admissions in the following terms:

**i. underwear;**

“Miss Hedges admits that she engaged in discussions with Pupil A in connection with underwear. Miss Hedges accepts that she initiated a conversation with Pupil A about the topic of thongs, which was in response to Pupil A asking what underwear Miss Hedges owned.

Miss Hedges also accepts that she received messages from Pupil A in which Pupil A described what underwear she liked.

Miss Hedges also accepts that Pupil A sent Miss Hedges internet images of underwear that Pupil A liked.

Miss Hedges accepts that she discussed with Pupil A what underwear Miss Hedges owned and how both Pupil A and Miss Hedges wore their underwear.”

#### **ii. relationships;**

“Miss Hedges accepts that Pupil A messaged her to ask whether Miss Hedges had a boyfriend.

Miss Hedges accepts that she engaged in a discussion with Pupil A about this issue, including by discussing with Pupil A what things put her off individuals.

Miss Hedges also accepts that she had a discussion with Pupil A about Miss Hedges’ relationship with [REDACTED] father.

Miss Hedges also admits that Pupil A sent her messages about Pupil A’s relationships.

Miss Hedges accepts that she helped Pupil A write a breakup message to Pupil A’s boyfriend.”

#### **iii. shaving;**

“Miss Hedges admits that Pupil A messaged her to say that she was shaving for the weekend.”

#### **iv. body piercings;**

“Miss Hedges admits that she discussed with Pupil A about nipple and belly button piercing.

Miss Hedges also admits that Pupil A shared an image of a belly button.”

#### **v. vaping;**

“Miss Hedges admits that Pupil A sent her a video of Pupil A using a vape.

Miss Hedges accepts that she told Pupil A that she had started smoking at 17-years-old, that she had stopped smoking two years prior, and that she had started vaping to help her do so.

Miss Hedges admits that she told Pupil A that she would take her vape to School.

Miss Hedges admits that she discussed vaping with Pupil A.”

Whilst many of Miss Hedges’ replies to Pupil A had been deleted and therefore only one side of the conversation could be seen, the panel was satisfied that in the messages

were discussions on the above topics and therefore Miss Hedges' admissions were consistent with the surrounding evidence.

The panel was further satisfied that such topics – when discussed in such an over familiar and casual fashion – were outside of the appropriate range of discussions which ought to be held between a teacher and pupil.

Accordingly, the panel found sub-allegation 1b proved.

### **c. met Pupil A and/or Pupil B outside of the School's premises.**

In the statement of agreed facts, Miss Hedges admitted this sub-allegation. The statement set out the admissions in the following terms:

“Miss Hedges admits that she met with Pupil A and Pupil B in a local park.

Miss Hedges accepts that Pupil A messaged her to let her know that she would be attending the park and to check whether Miss Hedges was still present at the park.

Miss Hedges accepts that by meeting Pupil A and Pupil B outside of school premises she had engaged in an inappropriate relationship with them.

Miss Hedges further accepts that her conduct at allegation 1c demonstrated a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with those pupils.”

In the Instagram messages before the panel, there were a number of messages from Pupil A to Miss Hedges about this event. Whilst Miss Hedges' responses had been deleted, the panel was satisfied that it could be inferred from Pupil A's responses that Ms Hedges did not seek to stop Pupil A and Pupil B from meeting her in the park. The panel was therefore satisfied that that Miss Hedges' admission to this allegation was consistent with the surrounding evidence and unequivocal.

Accordingly, the panel found sub-allegation 1c proved.

## **2. You sought to conceal your contact with Pupil A by:**

In the statement of agreed facts, Miss Hedges admitted this allegation. The statement set out the admissions in the following terms:

### **a. asking Pupil A to wait to communicate with you while your accounts were being monitored, or a comment to this effect;**

“Miss Hedges admits that she told Pupil A that their communication was being monitored and that Pupil A should unfollow her.

Miss Hedges also accepts that she told Pupil A to switch her profile to private.

Miss Hedges admits that after conveying this message to Pupil A, there was a period of approximately one week where Pupil A and Miss Hedges did not speak. After this week, the conversations between Miss Hedges and Pupil A resumed.

Miss Hedges also told Pupil A not to tell anyone about their contact.”

**b. deleting messages which you had sent to Pupil A;**

“Miss Hedges admits that she deleted a large majority of the messages she had sent to Pupil A. Miss Hedges admits that she did this to conceal the messages that she had sent to Pupil A.”

**c. misleading the school as to the nature and extent of your communication with one or more pupils.**

“At the School’s suspension meeting, Miss Hedges accepts that she told the School that Pupil A had been in communication with her for one week and that Miss Hedges had been trying to ‘bat her away’.

Miss Hedges admits that that she further reported that her communication with Pupil A had taken place between April 2023 – 2 May 2023 and that their contact had been inconsistent, taking place usually in bursts, and with long gaps of days between contact.

Miss Hedges admits that she deliberately provided a misleading picture to the School as to the extent of her communication with Pupil A.

At the School’s suspension meeting, Miss Hedges also admits that she told the School that the only pupil she had been in contact with was Pupil A.

Miss Hedges accepts that this was a demonstrable mistruth because she had also been in contact with Pupils B, C, and D.

By making this assertion to the School, Miss Hedges admits that she deliberately misled the School as to the nature and extent of her communication with pupils on social media.”

In the screenshots before the panel, the vast majority of Ms Hedges’ messages were not present, which the panel inferred as evidence that Ms Hedges’ messages had been deleted. In the remaining responses from Pupil A, there were discussions about people looking at their accounts. Additionally, before the panel was evidence from the School’s investigation, including a written statement provided by Miss Hedges and notes taken from her initial account in the investigatory meeting which took place on 16 June 2023 and which Miss Hedges had signed to confirm the accuracy of the meeting notes. The panel was therefore satisfied that Miss Hedges’ admission to this allegation was consistent with the surrounding evidence and unequivocal.

The panel therefore found allegation 2 proved.

**3. Your conduct as may be found proven at Allegation 2 above lacked integrity and/or was dishonest.**

In the statement of agreed facts, Miss Hedges admitted this allegation. The panel further noted that in the statement of agreed facts, Miss Hedges had been made aware of the relevant legal definitions for the concepts of dishonesty and integrity.

The panel was satisfied that the evidence showed that Miss Hedges was aware of the high level of inappropriate contact between her and other pupils at the time of the School's investigation. There was evidence that Miss Hedges was aware of the School's safeguarding policies and had previously implemented them. Miss Hedges made misleading comments in her written statement and initial verbal account to the School's investigation, in which she was asked in direct and simple language about communications with pupils. Having provided misleading answers and taken actions to conceal the level of communication, the panel was satisfied that the ordinary decent person would consider such knowing actions as being dishonest.

Accordingly, the panel found that Miss Hedges' actions as set out in allegation 2, was done so for a dishonest purpose.

Further to acting dishonestly being an essential example of acting without integrity, the panel took into account the evidence which suggested that another teacher had informally warned Miss Hedges about her Instagram account being open to the public (in breach of the School's code of conduct). Despite this, Miss Hedges continued to use social media in a wholly inappropriate way. The panel considered that to purposefully continue with such behaviour, particularly when on notice from colleagues that such behaviour was not acceptable, demonstrated a fundamental lack of integrity. Accordingly, the panel also found that Miss Hedges' actions lacked integrity.

The panel therefore found allegation 3 proved in full.

**4. You failed to take appropriate action and/or ensure appropriate action was taken with respect to safeguarding disclosure concerning Pupil A, in that you did not make disclosures to the Designated Safeguarding Lead when you became aware that Pupil A:**

In the statement of agreed facts, Miss Hedges admitted this allegation. The statement set out the admissions in the following terms:

**a. had stated that she and/others had been vaping;**

"Miss Hedges admits that Pupil A sent her a video of herself using a vape.

Miss Hedges accepts that she failed to take appropriate action on becoming aware of this, including by not disclosing this matter to the DSL...

Miss Hedges also accepts that Pupil A reported to her that she had vaped in the school toilets.

Miss Hedges accepts that she failed to take appropriate action on becoming aware of this information, including by not disclosing this matter to the DSL."

**b. had disclosed that they had kissed another individual for money**

"Miss Hedges accepts that Pupil A reported to her that she was dared to kiss another pupil in the park for money and did so.

Miss Hedges further accepts that Pupil A had told her that a boy had kissed her on the cheek for money and lip balm and that another boy had filmed it.

Miss Hedges accepts that she did not make a safeguarding disclosure in respect to this information and that upon receiving this information she ought to have done."

The panel was able to reference these events in the messages before it and therefore was satisfied that Miss Hedges' admissions were consistent with the surrounding evidence and unequivocal.

The panel was also satisfied that both disclosures made by Pupil A were the type which would be required to be passed on to a Designated Safeguarding Lead and that by not doing so, would amount to a failure of Miss Hedges' safeguarding duty.

Accordingly, the panel found allegation 4 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".

The panel was satisfied that the conduct of Miss Hedges, in relation to the facts found proved, involved breaches of the Teachers' Standards. The panel considered that, by reference to Part 2, Miss Hedges 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
- Teachers must have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach...
- 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 proven facts with Miss Hedges' social media interactions with pupils and safeguarding failures demonstrated a serious breach of these standards. Before the panel was evidence of the School's policies relating to social media which Miss Hedges had disregarded in her actions.

Miss Hedges' actions could not be categorised as a momentary lapse or insignificant in their nature. Miss Hedges' actions persisted for a sustained period, despite being informally approached by colleagues about her social media use and taking steps to conceal her activities once a formal investigation commenced. On that basis, the panel was satisfied that Miss Hedges' actions fell far below the expected behaviour of the profession.

The panel also considered whether Miss Hedges' conduct displayed behaviours associated with any of the offences listed on pages 10 and 11 of the Advice. 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. The panel found that none of these offences were relevant to its consideration of unacceptable professional conduct.

The panel noted that some of the allegations took place outside the education setting. As the conduct directly related to her inappropriate interactions with pupils which had exposed them to unsafe interactions over social media, the panel was satisfied that the conduct in question could still amount to unacceptable professional conduct.

In balancing these factors, the panel was therefore satisfied that Miss Hedges was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct.

In relation to whether Miss Hedges' actions amounted to conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, the panel took into account the way the teaching profession is viewed by others. It 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.

Miss Hedges' actions resulted in a total breakdown of the boundaries of professional relationships with pupils. It wholly undermined the 'role model' expectations the public places on teachers. Instead of teaching the dangers of social media to young children taking their initial steps into the online world, Miss Hedges actively exposed them to such risks.

The panel therefore found that Miss Hedges' actions constituted 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. 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 maintenance of public confidence in the profession;
- declaring and upholding proper standards of conduct.

In the light of the panel's findings against Miss Hedges, there was a strong public interest consideration in respect of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils, given the serious findings of inappropriate relationships with children. The panel considered that online safety is a fundamental aspect of modern safeguarding. Miss Hedges' disregard for these elements in her conduct was a very serious departure from the expected behaviour,



which would require a robust regulatory response in order to properly protect pupils in the future.

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

In addition to the public interest considerations set out above, the panel went on to consider whether there was a public interest in retaining Miss Hedges in the profession. The panel decided that there was a public interest consideration in retaining the teacher in the profession, since there was positive evidence of her abilities as an educator, and she would still be able to make a valuable contribution to the profession.

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 Miss Hedges.

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 Miss Hedges. 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;
- 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 pupils);
- 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);
- 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;

The panel carefully considered the dishonesty finding in this case. There were elements of Miss Hedges' actions which suggested it was not at the lower end of the spectrum of dishonesty. For example, there was evidence that Miss Hedges had been deleting messages between her and Pupil A prior to any concerns being raised. The panel inferred this suggested Miss Hedges had some early recognition that her conduct was improper yet continued to take actions to hide that conduct. Conversely, the panel did not consider Miss Hedges actions to be at the highest level of dishonesty. Many of her actions were simply reactive steps upon being investigated, which is not an uncommon feature in dishonesty cases, nor were they of a sophisticated nature. In balancing these factors, the panel considered that on the spectrum of dishonesty, Miss Hedges' actions fell in between the extreme ends.

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.

Whilst the panel considered that Miss Hedges' actions were of a deliberate nature, it noted that the situation appeared to have evolved from the pupils making initial contact with her and her subsequent failures to stop it. There was no evidence of duress in this case.

Individual B [REDACTED] explained in her written statement that although relatively new to the profession, she was generally regarded as a good teacher and was well respected by other staff, pupils and parents and that prior to these allegations being raised, she had no concerns about Miss Hedges. Individual B [REDACTED] described that Ms Hedges appeared to otherwise have a strong working knowledge of safeguarding requirements.

Miss Hedges has not sought to place any evidence of her abilities as an educator before the panel. Accordingly, the panel could not be satisfied there was evidence to say that she had made such an exceptional contribution to the education sector as to suggest there was a compelling public interest in retaining her in the profession, notwithstanding her serious misconduct.

The panel took into account that Miss Hedges had made substantial admissions and demonstrated a degree of remorse from the outset in this case, albeit full admissions were not made until much later in the proceedings. Furthermore, the panel noted that although she did not participate in the hearing, Miss Hedges had otherwise engaged with the regulatory process in order to resolve the allegations and that there were no previous regulatory findings made against her.

The panel has carefully considered the level of insight demonstrated by Miss Hedges. The panel view was that whilst there was some degree of insight, it was not currently at a sufficiently developed level which would assure the panel that there was no longer a material risk of such misconduct being repeated in the future. It is apparent from the evidence that Miss Hedges is capable of understanding the safeguarding processes in the profession and is able to correctly apply them in practice. It appears [REDACTED] have resulted in her dropping her professional guard and allowing herself to essentially seek friendships with [REDACTED] pupils. As Miss Hedges has not fully engaged with this hearing, the panel has not been able to fully explore this unusual position in any more detail. Miss Hedges did provide some brief written comments in regard to this topic and what steps she has taken to address them, such as [REDACTED]. However, the panel considered this information was too limited in being able to properly identify the underlying reasons as to her misconduct and to confirm that Miss Hedges had a workable strategy in place to ensure that such a recurrence would not be repeated. The panel was also concerned that Miss Hedges has continued to show limited insight into some aspects of her actions. Whilst she readily understands the nature and topics of the interactions were unsuitable, there has been little understanding of the inherent risks of harm to pupils in simply engaging with them in the first place over social media.

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 Miss Hedges 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 Miss Hedges. The current risk to pupils of a repetition of similar misconduct 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 where a case involves certain characteristics, it is likely that the public interest will have greater relevance and weight in favour of a longer period before a review is considered appropriate. These include 'fraud or serious dishonesty'. As

previously set out in these reasons, the panel did not consider that the dishonesty elements in this case were at the higher level. Accordingly, the panel was of the view that the public interest factors of maintaining confidence in the profession and upholding and declaring standards did not require an extended period of time to be imposed in this case.

Miss Hedges had previously demonstrated that she was able to appropriately safeguard pupils. The panel considered that the risks presented to pupils by Miss Hedges and the current deficiencies in her practice were remediable. The panel therefore decided that the findings indicated a situation in which a review period would be appropriate and, as such, decided that it would be proportionate, in all the circumstances, for the prohibition order to be recommended with provisions for a review period. The panel could not identify any material factors which suggested it should move from the starting point of 2 years.

Accordingly, the panel was of the view that it was appropriate and proportionate to recommend a prohibition order with an option to review the order after a period of 2 years.

## **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/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

The panel has made a recommendation to the Secretary of State that Miss Robyn Hedges should be the subject of a prohibition order, with a review period of 2 years.

In particular, the panel has found that Miss Hedges 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

- Teachers must have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach...
- 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 Miss Hedges fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession.

The findings of misconduct are serious as they include a teacher acting in a way that was dishonest and/or lacked integrity as well as a failure to adhere to safeguarding policies.

I have to determine whether the imposition of a prohibition order is proportionate and in the public interest. In assessing 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 Miss Hedges, 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 that:

“In the light of the panel’s findings against Miss Hedges, there was a strong public interest consideration in respect of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils, given the serious findings of inappropriate relationships with children. The panel considered that online safety is a fundamental aspect of modern safeguarding. Miss Hedges’ disregard for these elements in her conduct was a very serious departure from the expected behaviour, which would require a robust regulatory response in order to properly protect pupils in the future.”

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 it sets out as follows:

“The panel took into account that Miss Hedges had made substantial admissions and demonstrated a degree of remorse from the outset in this case, albeit full admissions were not made until much later in the proceedings. Furthermore, the panel noted that although she did not participate in the hearing, Miss Hedges had otherwise engaged with the regulatory process in order to resolve the allegations and that there were no previous regulatory findings made against her.”

The panel goes on to observe that:

“Miss Hedges has continued to show limited insight into some aspects of her actions. Whilst she readily understands the nature and topics of the interactions were unsuitable, there has been little understanding of the inherent risks of harm to pupils in simply engaging with them in the first place over social media.”

In my judgement, the lack of evidence that Miss Hedges has attained full insight into and remorse for her actions 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 observes that “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.” I am particularly mindful of the finding of dishonesty 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/or 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 Miss Hedges herself. The panel records having heard evidence attesting to her abilities as a teacher and that no concerns had been raised previously as to her conduct. The panel also heard evidence that Miss Hedges had otherwise demonstrated a strong working knowledge of safeguarding procedures.

A prohibition order would prevent Miss Hedges from teaching. A prohibition order would also clearly deprive the public of her contribution to the profession for the period that it is in force.

In this case, I have placed considerable weight on the panel’s comments concerning the lack of evidence that Miss Hedges has developed either full insight or remorse and the risk this raises that such behaviour could be repeated in the future.

I have given less weight in my consideration of sanction therefore, to the contribution that Miss Hedges 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 a 2 year review period.

I have given careful consideration to the panel's concluding comments:

“Miss Hedges had previously demonstrated that she was able to appropriately safeguard pupils. The panel considered that the risks presented to pupils by Miss Hedges and the current deficiencies in her practice were remediable. The panel therefore decided that the findings indicated a situation in which a review period would be appropriate and, as such, decided that it would be proportionate, in all the circumstances, for the prohibition order to be recommended with provisions for a review period. The panel could not identify any material factors which suggested it should move from the starting point of 2 years.”

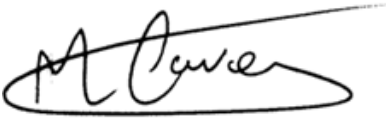
I have considered whether a 2 year review period reflects the seriousness of the findings and is a proportionate period to achieve the aim of maintaining public confidence in the profession. In this case, factors mean that, in my judgment, a two-year review period is sufficient to achieve the aim of maintaining public confidence in the profession. These elements are the lack of evidence of full insight or remorse and the attendant risk of a repeat of this behaviour in the future.

I consider therefore that a 2 year review period is required to satisfy the maintenance of public confidence in the profession.

**This means that Miss Robyn Hedges is prohibited from teaching indefinitely and cannot teach in any school, sixth form college, relevant youth accommodation or children's home in England.** She may apply for the prohibition order to be set aside, but not until 29 June 2026, 2 years from the date of this order at the earliest. This is not an automatic right to have the prohibition order removed. If she does apply, a panel will meet to consider whether the prohibition order should be set aside. Without a successful application, Miss Hedges remains prohibited from teaching indefinitely.

This order takes effect from the date on which it is served on the teacher.

Miss Hedges has a right of appeal to the High Court within 28 days from the date she is given notice of this order.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Cavey', enclosed within a large, loopy oval stroke.

**Decision maker: Marc Cavey**

**Date: 27 June 2024**

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