



Teaching
Regulation
Agency

Mr Thomas Singleton: Professional conduct panel meeting outcome

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

August 2024

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

Teacher:	Mr Thomas Singleton
Teacher ref number:	0882617
Teacher date of birth:	2 December 1980
TRA reference:	0020072
Date of determination:	02 August 2024
Former employer:	Mendlesham Primary School, Suffolk

Introduction

A professional conduct panel (“the panel”) of the Teaching Regulation Agency (“the TRA”) convened virtually on 02 August 2024, to consider the case of Mr Thomas Singleton.

The panel members were Mrs Rosemary Joyce (teacher panellist – in the chair), Mr Diarmuid Bunting (lay panellist) and Mrs Pamela Thompson (lay panellist).

The legal adviser to the panel was Miss Rachel Phillips of Blake Morgan LLP.

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

The meeting took place in private.

Allegations

The panel considered the allegations set out in the notice of meeting dated 29 April 2024.

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

He had been convicted at any time, of the following relevant offence:

- 1. On 24 August 2022, he was convicted at Ipswich Magistrates Court of the following relevant offences:**
 - a) Taking indecent photographs or pseudo-photographs of children on 5 February 2021 contrary to section 1 Protection of Children Act 1978;**
 - b) Taking indecent photographs or pseudo-photographs of children on 5 February 2021 contrary to section 1 Protection of Children Act 1978;**
 - c) Making indecent photograph or pseudo-photograph of children on 5 February 2021 contrary to section 1 (a) Protection of Children Act 1978;**
 - d) Making indecent photograph or pseudo-photograph of children on 5 February 2021 contrary to section 1 (a) Protection of Children Act 1978;**
 - e) Making indecent photograph or pseudo-photograph of children on 5 February 2021 contrary to section 1 (a) Protection of Children Act 1978;**
 - f) Possess a paedophile manual on 5 February 2021 contrary to section 69 (1) Serious Crime Act 2015;**
 - g) Possess prohibited images of children on 5 February 2021 contrary to section 62 (1) Coroners and Justice Act 2009;**
 - h) Possession of extreme pornographic images of intercourse/oral sex with dead/alive animal on 5 February 2021 contrary to section 63 (1) (7) (d) Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008.**

Mr Singleton admitted the facts of the allegations and that the offence amounted to a conviction for a relevant offence.

Preliminary applications

There were no preliminary applications.

Summary of evidence

Documents

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

Section 1: Chronology and List of Key People – pages 5 to 7.

Section 2: Notice of Referral, Response and Notice of Meeting – pages 8 to 33.

Section 3: Statement of Agreed Facts and Presenting Officer Representations – pages 34 to 40.

Section 4: Teaching Regulation Agency documents – pages 41 to 235.

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

Statement of agreed facts

The panel considered a statement of agreed facts which was signed by Mr Singleton on 12 November 2023.

Decision and reasons

The panel announced its decision and reasons as follows:

The panel carefully considered the case and reached a decision.

In advance of the meeting, the TRA agreed to a request from Mr Singleton for the allegations to be considered without a hearing.

The panel had the ability to direct that the case be considered at a hearing if required in the interests of justice or in the public interest. The panel did not determine that such a direction was necessary or appropriate in this case.

The panel proceeded to consider the case carefully, having read all of the documents, and reached a decision. It accepted the legal advice provided.

Mr Singleton was previously employed as Head of School at Mendlesham Primary School ("the School"), which is part of the John Milton Academy Trust, from 1 July 2020, until his voluntary resignation on 31 March 2021. Prior to this, Mr Singleton was employed as a class teacher from April 2010, and was responsible for teaching pupils in years 5 and 6.

On 5 February 2021, Mr Singleton was arrested by the National Crime Agency and released on bail with conditions.

On 22 March 2021, Mr Singleton tendered his resignation, and his last working day with the School was on 31 March 2021.

On 24 August 2022, Mr Singleton was convicted of 8 offences at Ipswich Magistrates' Court on 24 August 2022. These offences include making/taking indecent images of children, possessing extreme pornography and possessing prohibited images of children. Mr Singleton was placed on the sex offender register, and was remanded into custody.

On 13 October 2022, Mr Singleton was sentenced in Ipswich Crown Court.

Findings of fact

The findings of fact are as follows:

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

You have been convicted at any time, of the following relevant offences:

- 1. On 24 August 2022, you were convicted at Ipswich Magistrates Court of the following relevant offences:**
 - a) Taking indecent photographs or pseudo-photographs of children on 5 February 2021 contrary to section 1 Protection of Children Act 1978;**
 - b) Taking indecent photographs or pseudo-photographs of children on 5 February 2021 contrary to section 1 Protection of Children Act 1978;**
 - c) Making indecent photograph or pseudo-photograph of children on 5 February 2021 contrary to section 1 (a) Protection of Children Act 1978;**
 - d) Making indecent photograph or pseudo-photograph of children on 5 February 2021 contrary to section 1 (a) Protection of Children Act 1978;**
 - e) Making indecent photograph or pseudo-photograph of children on 5 February 2021 contrary to section 1 (a) Protection of Children Act 1978;**
 - f) Possess a paedophile manual on 5 February 2021 contrary to section 69 (1) Serious Crime Act 2015;**

g) Possess prohibited images of children on 5 February 2021 contrary to section 62 (1) Coroners and Justice Act 2009;

h) Possession of extreme pornographic images of intercourse/oral sex with dead/alive animal on 5 February 2021 contrary to section 63 (1) (7) (d) Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008.

The panel was presented with a statement of agreed facts, signed by Mr Singleton, in which this allegation was admitted.

The panel was also presented with a certificate of conviction from Ipswich Crown Court, confirming that Mr Singleton was convicted, on 24 August 2022, of the offences particularised in the allegation.

Mr Singleton was sentenced to:

1. 6 years imprisonment under Section 279 of the Sentencing Act 2020 served as a special custodial sentence comprising of 5 years custodial term and an extended licence period of 1 year with 2 years and 6 months concurrent determinate sentence;
2. £190 victim surcharge;
3. Sex offender registration;
4. Sexual harm prevention order; and
5. Ancillary order: forfeiture and destruction of seized devices and other exhibits

The panel accepted the certificate of conviction as conclusive proof of the commission of the offences by Mr Singleton.

In light of this and Mr Singleton's admission, the panel found the allegation proven.

Findings as to conviction of a relevant offence

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

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 Singleton in relation to the facts found proved, involved breaches of the Teachers’ Standards. The panel considered that, by reference to Part 2, he 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
 - ensuring that personal beliefs are not expressed in ways which exploit pupils' vulnerability...
- 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.

In addition, the panel noted that, pursuant to the Advice a "relevant offence" includes:

- A conviction for any offence that led to a term of imprisonment, including any suspended sentence; and
- A conviction for any offence that relates to, or involves, any activity involving viewing, taking, making, possessing, distributing or publishing any indecent photograph or image or indecent pseudo photograph or image of a child, or permitting any such activity, including one off incidents.

Over and above these matters, the panel determined that Mr Singleton's actions were clearly relevant to teaching, working with children and working in an education setting. Each of these offences was very serious in nature, and related to children.

The panel also took account of the way the teaching profession is viewed by others. The panel considered that Mr Singleton's behaviour in committing these offences would undoubtedly affect public confidence in the teaching profession, particularly given the influence that teachers may have on pupils, parents and others in the community. His conduct ran counter to what should be at the very core of the practice of a headteacher and safeguarding lead, with a duty of care towards children.

Mr Singleton's behaviour ultimately led to a lengthy term of imprisonment, which demonstrated the public and child protection issues engaged by his actions together with the other aspects of the sentence imposed.

The panel did not consider there to be any relevant mitigating circumstances in relation to the commission of these offences.

For all these reasons, the panel found that the seriousness of the offending behaviour that led to the conviction was directly relevant to Mr Singleton's ongoing suitability to teach. The panel considered that a finding that this conviction was for relevant offences was necessary to reaffirm clear standards of conduct so as to maintain public confidence in the teaching profession.

Panel's recommendation to the Secretary of State

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

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

The panel had regard to the particular public interest considerations set out in the Advice and, having done so, found a number of them to be relevant in this case, namely:

- The safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils and protection of other members of the public;
- the maintenance of public confidence in the profession; and
- declaring and upholding proper standards of conduct.

In light of the nature of the offences for which Mr Singleton was convicted, and having regard to the specific context, with particular reference to sentence imposed, there was an extremely strong public interest consideration in respect of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils and protection of other members of the public. Mr Singleton's actions raised obvious and significant public and child protection concerns.

The panel considered that public confidence in the profession would be significantly undermined if conduct such as that found against Mr Singleton was not treated with the utmost seriousness when regulating the profession. This was conduct that was, very clearly, at the most serious end of the spectrum, amounting to an egregious breach of the trust placed in him as a headteacher and safeguarding lead.

For the same reasons, the panel decided that a strong public interest consideration in declaring proper standards of conduct in the profession was also present.

No comments have been made about Mr Singleton's abilities as an educator. The panel was of the view that even if there was evidence presented to it that he had been an

exceptional practitioner, the seriousness of his conduct, that ultimately led to his conviction, means that it would not be in the public interest to retain him in the profession.

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

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 Singleton. The panel took further account of the Advice, which suggests that a prohibition order may be appropriate if certain behaviours of a teacher have been proved.

In the list of such behaviours, those that are relevant in this case are:

- serious departure from the personal and professional conduct elements of the Teachers' Standards;
- the commission of a serious criminal offence, including those that resulted in a conviction or caution, paying particular attention to offences that are 'relevant matters'...;
- 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);
- sexual misconduct, e.g. 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; and
- any activity involving viewing, taking, making, possessing, distributing, or publishing any indecent photograph or image, or indecent pseudo photograph or image, of a child, or permitting such activity, including one-off incidents.

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.

The panel considered that the following mitigating factors are present in this case:

- Mr Singleton made full admissions to the allegation against him.
- Mr Singleton pleaded guilty in the criminal proceedings.

Weighed against this, the aggravating features in this case included that:

- Mr Singleton's actions were pre-meditated and deliberate. They were also repeated.
- Mr Singleton's actions amounted to a clear breach of the Teachers' Standards and raised serious public and child protection concerns.
- Mr Singleton has been convicted of and sentenced for very serious offences involving children, for which he received a lengthy custodial sentence.
- Mr Singleton was in a position of trust and responsibility, as both a headteacher and safeguarding lead, he was a role model. He had fallen significantly short of the standards expected of him in that regard.

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

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

Mr Singleton's actions were fundamentally incompatible with his being a teacher. This was conduct of the most serious nature. The nature and gravity of the offence was a matter of significant concern. Accordingly, there were particularly strong public interest considerations in this case in terms of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils and protecting the public, public confidence in the teaching profession and the declaring of proper standards of conduct in this case.

The panel noted that Mr Singleton's behaviour led to him receiving a lengthy sentence, which is indicative of the seriousness of the offences.

The panel was therefore of the view that prohibition was both proportionate and appropriate. The panel decided that the public interest considerations outweighed the interests of Mr Singleton, and any mitigating factors identified.

Additionally, when balancing the aggravating and mitigating circumstances present in this case, its overall seriousness called for a higher regulatory sanction to protect the wider public interest factors.

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

The panel went on to consider whether or not it would be appropriate to recommend that a review period of the order should be considered.

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

The Advice indicates that there are behaviours that, if proved, would militate against the recommendation of a review period.

These behaviours include:

- serious sexual misconduct e.g. where the act was sexually motivated and resulted in, or had the potential to result in, harm to a person or persons, particularly where the individual has used their professional position to influence or exploit a person or persons;
- any sexual misconduct involving a child; and
- any activity involving viewing, taking, making, possessing, distributing or publishing any indecent photograph or image or indecent pseudo photograph or image of a child, including one off incidents.

The panel considered all of these behaviours to be directly applicable in this case.

In light of this and the panel's comments above, regarding the seriousness of these offences, the panel decided its findings indicated a situation in which a review period would not be appropriate.

The public interest considerations that Mr Singleton's conviction gives rise to were such that this was necessary, appropriate and proportionate.

Having regard to the nature of the offences and the sentence he received, the panel determined that Mr Singleton's actions are fundamentally incompatible with his being a teacher.

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 a relevant conviction

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

In particular, the panel has found that Mr Singleton 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
 - ensuring that personal beliefs are not expressed in ways which exploit pupils' vulnerability...
- 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 Mr Singleton fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession.

The findings of misconduct are particularly serious as they include a finding of taking and making indecent photographs or pseudo-photographs of children and possessing prohibited images of children and extreme pornographic images.

I have to determine whether the imposition of a prohibition order is proportionate and in the public interest. In considering that for this case, I have considered the overall aim of a prohibition order which is to protect pupils and to maintain public confidence in the profession. I have considered the extent to which a prohibition order in this case would achieve that aim taking into account the impact that it will have on the individual teacher. I have also asked myself whether a less intrusive measure, such as the published finding of a relevant conviction, would itself be sufficient to achieve the overall aim. I have to consider whether the consequences of such a publication are themselves sufficient. I

have considered therefore whether or not prohibiting Mr Singleton, 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:

“In light of the nature of the offences for which Mr Singleton was convicted, and having regard to the specific context, with particular reference to sentence imposed, there was an extremely strong public interest consideration in respect of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils and protection of other members of the public. Mr Singleton's actions raised obvious and significant public and child protection concerns.”

A prohibition order would therefore prevent such a risk from being present in the future.

The panel has noted that Mr Singleton made full admissions to the allegation against him and pleaded guilty in the criminal proceedings. However, the panel has not commented on the level of insight and remorse shown by Mr Singleton.

I have gone on to consider the extent to which a prohibition order would maintain public confidence in the profession. The panel has observed:

“The panel considered that public confidence in the profession would be significantly undermined if conduct such as that found against Mr Singleton was not treated with the utmost seriousness when regulating the profession. This was conduct that was, very clearly, at the most serious end of the spectrum, amounting to an egregious breach of the trust placed in him as a headteacher and safeguarding lead.”

I am particularly mindful of the finding of a conviction for taking and making indecent images of children and possessing prohibited images of children and extreme pornography 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 a relevant conviction, 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 Singleton himself. The panel has noted:

“No comments have been made about Mr Singleton's abilities as an educator. The panel was of the view that even if there was evidence presented to it that he had been an exceptional practitioner, the seriousness of his conduct, that ultimately led to his conviction, means that it would not be in the public interest to retain him in the profession.”

A prohibition order would prevent Mr Singleton 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 comments concerning the seriousness of Mr Singleton's misconduct. The panel has said:

“Mr Singleton's actions were fundamentally incompatible with his being a teacher. This was conduct of the most serious nature. The nature and gravity of the offence was a matter of significant concern. Accordingly, there were particularly strong public interest considerations in this case in terms of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils and protecting the public, public confidence in the teaching profession and the declaring of proper standards of conduct in this case.”

I have given less weight in my consideration of sanction therefore, to the contribution that Mr Singleton 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 evidence of insight and remorse, 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.

The panel has noted the Advice indicates the public interest will have greater relevance and weigh in favour of not offering a review period where cases include serious sexual misconduct, any sexual misconduct involving a child, and any activity involving taking, making or possessing any indecent photograph or image of a child.

I have considered whether not allowing a review period reflects the seriousness of the findings and is proportionate to achieve the aim of maintaining public confidence in the profession. In this case, 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 serious nature of the offences of which Mr Singleton was convicted and for which he received a lengthy prison sentence, and the lack of evidence of insight and remorse.

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

This means that Mr Thomas Singleton 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 Singleton 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 Thomas Singleton 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.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Oatley', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Decision maker: David Oatley

Date: 6 August 2024

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