



Teaching
Regulation
Agency

Mr Michael Bedford: Professional conduct panel outcome

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

November 2024

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

Teacher:	Mr Michael Bedford
Teacher ref number:	1674343
Teacher date of birth:	21 June 1985
TRA reference:	19035
Date of determination:	6 November 2024
Former employer:	Netherwood Academy, Barnsley

Introduction

A professional conduct panel (“the panel”) of the Teaching Regulation Agency (“the TRA”) convened on 4 November 2024, by virtual means, to consider the case of Mr Michael Bedford.

The panel members were Mr Paul Hawkins (lay panellist – in the chair), Ms Jan Stoddard (lay panellist) and Mrs Karen Graham (teacher panellist).

The legal adviser to the panel was Mrs Luisa Gibbons of Eversheds Sutherland (International) LLP solicitors.

The presenting officer for the TRA was Mr Ben Bentley of Browne Jacobson LLP solicitors.

Mr Bedford was not present and was not represented.

The hearing took place in public, save for parts of the hearing which were heard in private and was recorded.

Allegations

The panel considered the allegations set out in the notice of proceedings dated 5 July 2024.

It was alleged that Mr Bedford was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, in that whilst employed at Netherwood Academy:

1. He failed to maintain professional boundaries / engaged in an inappropriate relationship with one or more pupils in that he:
 - a. Exchanged emails during school hours and outside school hours in which he;
 - i. Discussed confidential meetings and/or information with Pupil A;
 - ii. Organised for Pupil A to visit his classroom during school hours;
 - iii. Organised to meet with Pupil A in his classroom after school;
 - iv. Sent a restaurant voucher to Pupil A;
 - v. Discussed giving Pupil A money in order to buy Mr Bedford food;
 - vi. Told Pupil A 'not to tell anyone about Mr Bedford's job interview' or used words to that effect;
 - vii. Told Pupil A about Mr Bedford's informal support plan;
 - viii. Told Pupil A that Mr Bedford was 'fed up at Netherwood' or used words to that effect;
 - ix. Gossiped about two former employees of the School;
 - b. Took Pupil A on a trip without reporting this to the School;
 - c. Purchased and/or supplied oral supplements and or anabolic steroids to Pupil B;
 - d. Instructed and/or permitted Pupil B to purchase one or more e-cigarettes for him;
 - e. Exchanged texts during school hours and outside school hours with Pupil B in which Mr Bedford;
 - i. Discussed meeting up with Pupil B;
 - ii. In relation to the use by Pupil B of oral supplements and/or anabolic steroids which Mr Bedford supplied, stated to Pupil B that 'u need stop them b4 ur army medical u wont pass the drugs tests with them in system' or used words to the effect;
 - iii. Informed Pupil B that the School had formally suspended Mr Bedford or used words to the effect;
2. His conduct at allegation 1.c. and 1.e. above was:

- a. Done wholly or partly whilst he was on management leave and therefore at a time when Mr Bedford was instructed not to contact pupils;
- b. In the knowledge that these oral supplements and/or anabolic steroids, were intended to be sold to one or more other pupils;
- c. Notwithstanding that these supplements and anabolic steroids were only permitted to be taken by individuals aged 18 years old and over.

In the absence of any response from Mr Bedford, the allegations were not admitted.

Preliminary applications

Applicable Procedures

The panel noted that Mr Bedford was referred to the Teaching Regulation Agency on 17 January 2020, at a time when the Teacher misconduct: disciplinary procedures for the teaching profession updated April 2018 (“the 2018 Procedures”) applied. The Teacher misconduct: Disciplinary procedures for the teaching profession May 2020 (“the 2020 Procedures”) were subsequently introduced. Given the date of referral, the earlier provisions apply to this case, unless, in the interests of justice or the public interest, the TRA or the panel directs otherwise.

The panel noted that the notice of proceedings contained cross-references to specific paragraphs of the May 2020 Procedures and that a written application to admit the hearsay evidence of Pupil B had stated that it was made pursuant to the May 2020 Procedures. In contrast, the application dated 22 October 2024 to proceed in Mr Bedford’s absence was made pursuant to the April 2018 Procedures.

The presenting officer recognised that the references to the May 2020 Procedures had been erroneous and applied for the hearsay evidence of Pupil B to be admitted pursuant to the April 2018 Procedures.

The panel did not consider that any unfairness would be caused to Mr Bedford by applying the April 2018 Procedures since those would ordinarily apply to a case referred in January 2020. The panel did not consider that it was in the interests of justice or the public interest to direct otherwise.

The panel decided that the April 2018 Procedures would apply in this case.

Proceeding in Absence

The panel considered the presenting officer’s application for the hearing to continue in the absence of the teacher.

The panel was satisfied that TRA had complied with the service requirements of paragraph 19(1) (a) to (c) of the Teachers' Disciplinary (England) Regulations 2012, (the "Regulations").

The panel was also satisfied that the Notice of Proceedings complied with paragraphs 4.11 and 4.12 of the 2018 Procedures.

The panel determined to exercise its discretion under paragraph 4.29 of the Procedures to proceed with the hearing in the absence of the teacher.

The panel took as its starting point the principle from R v Jones that its discretion to commence a hearing in the absence of the teacher had to be exercised with the utmost care and caution, and that its discretion is a severely constrained one. In considering the question of fairness, the panel recognised that fairness to the professional is of prime importance but that it also encompasses the fair, economic, expeditious and efficient disposal of allegations against the professional, as was explained in GMC v Adeogba & Visvardis.

In making its decision, the panel noted that the teacher may waive his right to participate in the hearing. The panel firstly took account of the various factors drawn to its attention from the case of R v Jones.

The panel noted that on 15 May 2024, Mr Bedford was asked if he was content for the hearing to take place virtually or whether he would prefer for the hearing to take place in person, and was asked for any dates that he would not be available to attend the hearing. Mr Bedford responded the same day to say he did not intend to attend. He was asked if he was content for the hearing to proceed in his absence, and Mr Bedford responded "Yes".

On 21 October 2024, Mr Bedford was asked a number of questions. He responded on 22 October 2024 responding "Yes" that he voluntarily waived his right to attend the final hearing; "Yes" that he was content for the panel to make a decision in his absence; and "Yes" that he understood that the panel might make findings against him, which may lead to the imposition of a prohibition order. He was also asked to provide the reasons for his non-attendance. His response stated "Because this process has taken a rediculus [sic] time over 3 yeas [sic] has causes [sic] me [REDACTED] as I have told you in the pass [sic]!! [REDACTED]". On 24 October Mr Bedford sent an email which included the comment "For the avoidance of doubt I will not be in attendance."

The panel considered whether an adjournment might allow for Mr Bedford's attendance, in case it was the [REDACTED] that lay behind his decision not to attend. However, given that Mr Bedford had maintained his decision not to attend over a number of months

and had not requested any adjournment, nor had he submitted any evidence in his defence, the panel considered that Mr Bedford had waived his right to attend. The panel did not consider that it was likely that an adjournment might result in Mr Bedford attending. Any such adjournment would likely be for a number of months in order for a panel to be convened.

Upon Mr Bedford learning that he had been referred to the TRA and that an investigation was to be conducted, Mr Bedford initially expressed confusion as he referred to the matter having been dealt with over two years previously, but that he would speak with his solicitor. Upon receiving further clarification, Mr Bedford explained that he had been confused, having received various letters from others, and that he would need to reinstruct his solicitor. Nevertheless, the panel has seen nothing from a solicitor indicating that Mr Bedford was represented, nor had he expressed any wish to adjourn in order to obtain legal representation.

Mr Bedford has not provided any statement for these proceedings nor any evidence in his defence. He did not participate in the disciplinary proceedings conducted by Netherwood Academy (“the School”) and provided two “no comment” interviews to the police. The panel was cognisant that it did not have any response or explanation by Mr Bedford regarding the matters alleged. However, the panel noted that three witnesses relied upon were to be called to give evidence and the panel could test their evidence by questioning those witnesses, considering such points as are favourable to the teacher, as was reasonably available on the evidence. The panel was also able to exercise vigilance in making its decision, taking into account the degree of risk of the panel reaching the wrong decision as a result of not having heard the teacher’s account.

The panel recognised that the allegations against the teacher were serious and that there was a real risk that if proven, the panel would be required to consider whether to recommend that the teacher ought to be prohibited from teaching.

The panel recognised that the efficient disposal of allegations against teachers is required to ensure the protection of pupils and to maintain confidence in the profession. The conduct alleged was said to have taken place whilst the teacher was employed at the School. The School would likely have had an interest in this hearing taking place in order to move forwards.

The panel also noted that there were three witnesses prepared to give evidence, and that it would have been inconvenient and potentially distressing for this to be rearranged. Delaying the case may have impacted upon the memories of those witnesses, particularly given that over five years have passed since the alleged conduct.

The panel decided that, in light of:

- the teacher's waiver of his right to appear;
- the inconvenience an adjournment would cause to the witnesses; and
- the public interest in this hearing proceeding without further delay,

the hearing should proceed in Mr Bedford's absence.

Admission of Hearsay Evidence

The presenting officer applied for the hearsay evidence of Pupil B to be admitted. Under paragraph 4.18 of the 2018 Procedures, the panel may admit any evidence, where it is fair to do so, which may reasonably be considered to be relevant to the case.

The panel considered that the note of the meeting held with Pupil B as part of the School's investigation was relevant to allegations 1.c., 1.d., 1.e., 2.a., 2.b., and 2.c.

The central question for the panel was whether it was fair in the circumstances to allow the evidence of Pupil B to be put forward, without the opportunity for Pupil B to be questioned regarding that evidence.

The panel took account of the efforts made to secure the attendance of Pupil B. An email from Pupil B dated 17 May 2023 stated that Pupil B did not want to participate in this process "which is about something that happened when I was at school. I have moved on with my life & I'm trying to build a future & a business which I just want to concentrate on."

The TRA subsequently sent a letter dated 12 June 2023 to Pupil B informing them of additional support or special measures that might be made available, and making them aware that a request was being made for them to provide a witness statement pursuant to section 10 of the Teachers' Disciplinary (England) Regulations 2012.

Subsequent emails were sent by the presenting officer's firm to Pupil B on 4 July 2023 and 24 July 2023 with no response from Pupil B. [REDACTED], Witness 2, responded on 26 July 2023 saying that Pupil B had responded to say that they did not want to give any statement or take part in any way. On 31 July 2023, the presenting officer's firm contacted Witness 2 to ask if Pupil B was willing to reconsider. Witness 2 responded on 31 July 2023 to say they would speak with Pupil B again, but "I know what [REDACTED] answer will be". Witness 2 was asked again on 9 August 2024 whether they had been able to speak with Pupil B.

On 21 August 2023, the presenting officer's firm spoke with Witness 2. Witness 2 referred to Pupil B being adamant that they did not want to be involved, and [REDACTED].

In the circumstances, the panel was of the view that considerable efforts had been made to secure the attendance of Pupil B.

The panel exercised caution given the seriousness of the allegations in this case, and that it would be open to the panel to recommend prohibition in this case if the allegations were found proven.

The panel carefully considered the importance of the evidence and whether it constituted a critical part of the evidence against Mr Bedford. The panel had email communications between Pupil B and Mr Bedford that the police had obtained from Mr Bedford's devices. Pupil B's evidence was not therefore the sole or decisive evidence in relation to the majority of the allegations concerning Mr Bedford's alleged conduct towards Pupil B.

The panel noted that Witness 2 was to be called who raised the concerns about Mr Bedford's conduct towards Pupil B. Witness 1 was also to give oral evidence and the panel could ask questions about the meeting in which the note of Pupil B's evidence was taken. The panel was, therefore, satisfied that there was some means of testing the reliability of Pupil B's evidence.

The panel decided that it was fair to admit the evidence of Pupil B, with the absence of Pupil B being reflected in the weight to be attached to their evidence.

Excluding the Public

The panel heard parts of Witness 1 and Witness 2's evidence in private concerning private personal matters relating to Pupil B.

Summary of evidence

Documents

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

Section 1: Chronology and anonymised pupil list – pages 7 to 8

Section 2: Notice of proceedings and response – pages 9 to 14

Section 3: Teaching Regulation Agency witness statements – pages 15 to 160

Section 4: Teaching Regulation Agency documents – pages 161 to 550

Section 5: Teacher documents – pages 551 to 564

The panel also received two audio recordings of police interviews with Mr Bedford.

In addition, the panel agreed to accept the following documents:

A proceeding in absence application dated 22 October 2024 (5 pages) and an exchange of emails between Mr Bedford and the presenting officer's firm regarding his non-attendance (2 pages).

A written application for the hearsay evidence of Pupil B to admitted, dated 22 April 2024, with appended documents (39 pages), together with an email to Mr Bedford from the presenting officer's firm dated 22 April 2024 enclosing the application (1 page).

The panel considered that the emails accompanying the proceeding in absence application were relevant to whether the hearing could proceed in Mr Bedford's absence, and that it was fair to admit them in order to give proper consideration to the reasons for Mr Bedford's non-attendance.

The panel noted that the majority of the documents appended to the hearsay application had been contained within the panel bundle. The panel considered that the remainder of the documents were relevant since they provided an explanation of why Pupil B would not be giving oral evidence, and that it was fair to admit them in order to give proper consideration as to whether to admit the hearsay evidence of Pupil B.

The panel members confirmed that they had read all of the documents within the bundle, in advance of the hearing and the additional documents that the panel decided to admit. The panel also listened to the two audio recordings of Mr Bedford's police interviews before any oral evidence was given.

Witnesses

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

Witness 1 – [REDACTED];

Pupil A; and

Witness 2 – [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.

Mr Bedford was employed as a science teacher at the School from 1 September 2017.

Concerns were raised on 5 April 2019 regarding Mr Bedford's conduct, and he was placed on management leave on 9 April 2019.

The police interviewed Mr Bedford on 2 August 2019 and 30 October 2020.

On 7 May 2019, Mr Bedford resigned from his role with effect from 1 September 2019.

A referral to the TRA was made by the School on 20 January 2020.

On 9 February 2022, the police confirmed that no further action was to be taken against Mr Bedford.

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 failed to maintain professional boundaries / engaged in an inappropriate relationship with one or more pupils in that you:**
 - a. Exchanged emails during school hours and outside school hours in which you;**
 - i. Discussed confidential meetings and/or information with Pupil A;**

Pupil A gave evidence that Mr Bedford had not taught them any subjects whilst they were at the School. However, [REDACTED] was introduced to Mr Bedford by [REDACTED] at the time, as [REDACTED] and Mr Bedford had his own company or worked for an external company that specialised in first aid and medical services.

Pupil A stated that, at the time, [REDACTED] and would email Mr Bedford asking if [REDACTED] could speak with him. Pupil A could not recall how the email exchange began or who emailed first, but that was their only form of communication. Pupil A stated that they did not have each other's telephone numbers and communicated via email or in person.

Witness 1 exhibited to [REDACTED] statement copies of email messages Pupil A had exchanged with Mr Bedford. There were emails sent by Mr Bedford from three different accounts to Pupil A, those being:

- his School email account;
- an account from a company that Mr Bedford was a director of ("the Second Account"); and
- an account from another business which listed Mr Bedford's phone number as a contact on their website ("the Third Account").

Since the email address of the person with whom Mr Bedford was communicating had been redacted from the messages, in oral evidence Pupil A confirmed which messages [REDACTED] had been party to.

An email was sent from Pupil A on 4 February 2019, asking if Mr Bedford would be around or “do[es he] have to go straight there”. Mr Bedford replied “be in room for a bit before go thru to hell.” The content of the message implied that Pupil A was aware that Mr Bedford was going to something difficult. On the same day, Mr Bedford messaged Pupil A to say “[REDACTED] just grabbed me.” indicating that he was sharing information with a student about a meeting with another staff member. Witness 1 confirmed in oral evidence that [REDACTED] was the [REDACTED], who was providing feedback to Mr Bedford on that day regarding one of his lessons.

Pupil A sent an email to Mr Bedford on 13 February 2019 with the heading “meeting” and asking “how did it go?”. Mr Bedford responded with a sad face emoji and Pupil A asked whether he was in trouble. Mr Bedford responded asking whether Pupil A was in School. Pupil A stated that [REDACTED] was not, and Mr Bedford replied saying “come and find me in morn I’ll explain”. Mr Bedford had feedback on 13 February 2019 as a follow up to the meeting on 4 February 2019. This was evidenced by a formal lesson observation proforma seen by the panel.

The panel considered that the meetings between Mr Bedford and his [REDACTED] were confidential, and that from the exchange it was apparent that information regarding those meetings was being discussed with Pupil A.

The panel considered that this was a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries and evidenced that Mr Bedford engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil A. Pupil A described their relationship as more of a friendship than a teacher/pupil relationship. Providing confidential information to Pupil A regarding management meetings contributed towards establishing that friendship.

The panel found this allegation proven.

ii. Organised for Pupil A to visit his classroom during school hours;

Pupil A stated that when [REDACTED], Mr Bedford’s classroom became “somewhere [[REDACTED]] would go and vent to him”. They also stated that they would speak about science lessons and sometimes [REDACTED] would sit in on his lessons teaching science, but because he was teaching lower levels, [REDACTED] would leave.

On 1 February 2019, Pupil A sent an email at 1:50pm asking Mr Bedford if he had a free period. Mr Bedford responded within two minutes confirming that he was, and invited Pupil A to his classroom.

On 13 February 2019, in the evening, Mr Bedford and Pupil A exchanged messages regarding the location of the event [REDACTED] was going to attend with him. Pupil A

sent a message stating “Yeah, but your room can’t be busy when we sort it out” and Mr Bedford responded “True, come as soon u at school can kick others out”.

On 25 February 2019, Pupil A sent a message telling Mr Bedford that they would “Probably be down at 3 gunna tell supply I’m going home to get out” [sic] and then stated “2 eve, do you reckon [redacted] will come in”. Mr Bedford replied and said that one teacher had been in, and the other had a class. Pupil A responded “so it’ll be safe to come down” and Mr Bedford replied “should be”.

The panel considered that this was a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries, and evidenced that Mr Bedford engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil A. Allowing Pupil A to come to his room without any educational purpose during school hours contributed towards establishing the friendship that Pupil A perceived them to have. The impropriety of such meetings was acknowledged by their comments referring to others not being present.

The panel found this allegation proven.

iii. Organised to meet with Pupil A in his classroom after school;

At 2:15pm on 4 February 2019, Pupil A made contact asking if Mr Bedford would be around straight after school. Mr Bedford responded that he would “be in room for a bit”. On 8 February 2019, Pupil A messaged Mr Bedford asking “have you finished yet” and Mr Bedford replied at 4:25pm to say he was in his room.

The panel considered that this was a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries, and evidenced that Mr Bedford engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil A. Allowing Pupil A to come to his room without any educational purpose after school hours contributed towards establishing the friendship that Pupil A perceived them to have.

The panel found this allegation proven.

iv. Sent a restaurant voucher to Pupil A;

Pupil A stated that, on one occasion, [REDACTED] was taking [REDACTED] boyfriend out for a meal, and Mr Bedford sent [REDACTED] vouchers for the meal.

On 27 February 2019, Mr Bedford sent a message to Pupil A from the Third Account forwarding an advert for a voucher that could be used in the restaurant. The panel has seen the advertisement for discounted offers at the restaurant for example, £5 pizzas and inviting the recipient to claim a voucher to receive the offer.

The panel considered that this was a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries, and evidenced that Mr Bedford engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil A. In the context of the pattern of behaviour referred to in the proven allegations,

this too contributed towards establishing the friendship that Pupil A perceived them to have.

The panel found this allegation proven.

v. Discussed giving Pupil A money in order to buy you food;

Pupil A also stated that there was another time, when the pupils were performing a showcase at School and between the end of the School day and rehearsals, the pupils went to the high street to buy some food. Pupil A stated that Mr Bedford offered to give [REDACTED] some money to pick him up something, but Pupil A had not gone in the end as [REDACTED] had provided extra food for [REDACTED].

One of Mr Bedford's messages asked whether Pupil A was getting food after school. Pupil A replied asking if he was referring to the following day. Mr Bedford confirmed this, and Pupil A responded that they were going to McDonalds. Mr Bedford replied stating "I'll give you some money get me some I'll go dunkin get some donuts."

The panel considered that this was a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries, and evidenced that Mr Bedford engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil A. In the context of the pattern of behaviour referred to in the proven allegations, this too contributed towards establishing the friendship that Pupil A perceived them to have.

The panel found this allegation proven.

vi. Told Pupil A 'not to tell anyone about your job interview' or used words to that effect;

Pupil A stated that Mr Bedford told [REDACTED] he was planning to leave the School, and that he had an interview with a school closer to his house. Pupil A stated that [REDACTED] remembered that he told [REDACTED] not to tell anyone about their communication, about him going for interviews or leaving the School.

On 11 February 2019, Mr Bedford sent an email to Pupil A and another recipient saying "don't tell people – didn't get it, looks like stuck at Netherwood".

The panel considered that this was a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries, and evidenced that Mr Bedford engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil A. In the context of the pattern of behaviour referred to in the proven allegations, this too contributed towards establishing the friendship that Pupil A perceived them to have.

The panel found this allegation proven.

viii. Told Pupil A that you were 'fed up at Netherwood' or used words to that effect;

Following the message on 11 February 2019 in which Mr Bedford referred to being “stuck at Netherwood”. Pupil B replied “your [sic] stuck with us then” and Mr Bedford responded “yea [sic] well fed up”.

The panel considered that this was a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries, and evidenced that Mr Bedford engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil A. In the context of the pattern of behaviour referred to in the proven allegations, this too contributed towards establishing the friendship that Pupil A perceived them to have.

The panel found this allegation proven.

ix. Gossiped about two former employees of the School;

Pupil A stated that [REDACTED] and Mr Bedford would email each other discussing and making “silly little comments about other teachers in relationships”.

On 4 February 2019 Pupil A sent a message to Mr Bedford saying that [REDACTED] had remembered some gossip to share. Mr Bedford responded saying “if it is good gossip share need a cheer up.”

On 19 February 2019, Pupil A sent an email to Mr Bedford stating that two teachers had come in to the place she worked, and referred to one feeding the other cake. Mr Bedford replied “gross” and “please tell you wound them up!!”.

Whilst Mr Bedford did not impart any information, he was an active participant in such conversations. In oral evidence, Pupil A explained that this was more akin to how Pupil A would speak with [REDACTED] friends, than how [REDACTED] would speak with [REDACTED] other teachers and that Mr Bedford never said that there was anything inappropriate about such conversations or asked [REDACTED] to stop sharing.

The panel considered that this was a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries, and evidenced that Mr Bedford engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil A. Engaging in discussions in which gossip was being shared contributed towards establishing the friendship that Pupil A perceived them to have.

The panel found this allegation proven.

b. Took Pupil A on a trip without reporting this to the School;

Pupil A stated that on 23 March 2019, [REDACTED] accompanied Mr Bedford and other people from the company he worked for on a trip to a [REDACTED]. Pupil A stated they were providing first aid to people who suffered from accidents which resulted in injuries such as cuts, sprains and bruises. Pupil A stated that, during the trip, they stayed in the sports hall and Mr Bedford drove Pupil A back. Pupil A stated that [REDACTED] had not

informed the School and was not sure if Mr Bedford had. Pupil A confirmed that [REDACTED] had given [REDACTED] verbal consent to go.

The panel has seen an exchange between Mr Bedford, using the Second Account, and Pupil A. It referred to an event that Pupil A was going to observe, “if we can arrange with parents ect [sic] will talk Tuesday with you 23rd March Is a roler [sic] derby triple match you could come obs at.” Pupil A asked where it was being held, and Mr Bedford responded “Salford... happy arrange transport”. Pupil A responded that “your room can’t be busy when we sort it out”. Mr Bedford replied “true come as soon u at school can kick others out.” On 18 February 2019, Mr Bedford provided details of the event and pick up times to Pupil A.

In oral evidence, Pupil A stated that it may have been that, sub-consciously, [REDACTED] knew that this had to be discussed with others not around, since [REDACTED] knew it was wrong for a teacher to be taking a pupil on a trip. From the exchange it is apparent that Mr Bedford was also aware of this having agreed that they would need to discuss this when they were on their own.

Witness 1 gave evidence that she had received information from another pupil that Pupil A had been to “Manchester” in Mr Bedford’s car. Witness 1 stated that [REDACTED] and the [REDACTED] spoke with Mr Bedford on 5 April 2019 about this. Witness 1 stated that Mr Bedford had informed them that he had received authorisation from Pupil A’s [REDACTED], and Mr Bedford was asked to provide a copy of this. Mr Bedford stated that he was working for his own company at the time, that being what Witness 1 described as a “private ambulance company”. Witness 1 stated that on the following Monday, Mr Bedford had not provided the information requested but did provide other various documents associated with the event. Pupil A stated that [REDACTED] had asked for the authorisation from Pupil A’s parents on several occasions but did not receive a response. The [REDACTED] of Pupil A was contacted who confirmed that [REDACTED] was aware of the trip but had not received any documents.

Witness 1 confirmed in their evidence that, to their knowledge, Mr Bedford had not reported the trip to the School.

In notes taken of the information Pupil A provided to the School during its investigation, Pupil A stated that they travelled with Mr Bedford on their own to the [REDACTED].

The panel considered that this was a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries and evidenced that Mr Bedford engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil A. Pupil A was singled out as a sole pupil attending this trip. Travelling alone with a pupil put Mr Bedford at risk of allegations against him. Whilst there may have been educational value to the experience, not informing the School meant that they were unable to put in place any safeguarding measures.

The panel found this allegation proven.

c. Purchased and/or supplied oral supplements and or anabolic steroids to Pupil B;

Witness 2 stated that they had noticed that Pupil B's [REDACTED] mentioned Mr Bedford a lot. Witness 2 stated that Pupil B had been idolising Mr Bedford saying that he could get things off the dark web, and Pupil B had been intrigued by this.

He stated that, after Pupil B left the house one day, Pupil B's [REDACTED] had gone into [REDACTED] room and found some pills in [REDACTED] bedroom and a note bearing Mr Bedford's name and address. [REDACTED] also found that money was missing from [REDACTED] room. Witness 2 stated they had contacted the School to express their suspicion that Mr Bedford had been supplying Pupil B with pills.

Witness 1 stated that on 14 April 2019, the parents of Pupil B reported to the School that Mr Bedford was supplying "steroids/pills" to Pupil B.

A note of a subsequent meeting on 17 April 2019 with Witness 2 is appended to Witness 1's witness statement. This note included the additional detail that £150 had been missing from Pupil B's room.

A copy of the "shipping note" was provided by Witness 2 to Witness 1 on 27 April 2019. This document was only partially legible, but it stated "Shipping to Michael Bedfo...and a partial address". In oral evidence, Witness 2 stated that this shipping label was not found with the pills, nor was any packaging found, so he could not say that they came together, but given that they were in the same room, he surmised that they related to each other.

Witness 1 stated that a meeting was held with Pupil B on 30 April 2019. Witness 1 stated that Pupil B had been upset, defensive and came across as being "a little bit scared of Mr Bedford." A contemporaneous note of the meeting appended to Witness 1's statement included a comment that Pupil B had said "Mr Bedford is not someone you mess with and that [he] could get in trouble."

Witness 1 stated that Pupil B informed [REDACTED] that Mr Bedford bought "steroids" for Pupil B. This was confirmed by the contemporaneous note of the meeting. Pupil B stated in that meeting that he had been buying "steroids" from Mr Bedford "every week to 10 days for the last two to three months." Pupil B stated that the "internet says they are a natural supplement, but they are really like steroids" He named the drugs as [REDACTED].

Witness 1 stated that Pupil B had shown [REDACTED] on a computer which substances Mr Bedford had ordered for [REDACTED].

In connection with the police investigation, a [REDACTED] provided a statement in which he produced information he had extracted from a mobile phone belonging to Mr Bedford. The messages are colour coded to identify those sent by Mr Bedford and those received

from Pupil B. The messages included a message from Pupil B to Mr Bedford on 16 April 2019 at 4:23pm stating “That [REDACTED] that I order [sic] isn’t here?”

The police log of their investigation also refers to two invoices having been obtained with Mr Bedford’s name on them confirming a substance called [REDACTED] had been purchased.

On 19 April 2019 at 11:45am, Pupil B sent a message to Mr Bedford stating “Someone has messaged mi saying I’m selling drug and they have take a pic of me and sent it to me mum so I’m keeping all mi pill at mi mate house aha” [sic]. Mr Bedford responded at 11:46am stating “Shit not pic me dripping stuff off to u is it lol” [sic].

In oral evidence, Witness 1 stated that there were aspects of what Pupil B had told [REDACTED] that [REDACTED] did not believe, for example that [REDACTED] had not taken the substances himself. The panel noted that the contemporaneous note of their meeting referred to Pupil B stating that [REDACTED] and Mr Bedford had had no contact via phone, email or anything else, and they had only communicated at School, and when [REDACTED] saw Mr Bedford one Sunday outside School. The panel had sight of the messages extracted from the mobile phone exchanged between Pupil B and Mr Bedford. Pupil B’s denial of such mobile phone contact could not be true. The panel viewed Pupil B’s evidence as recorded in the contemporaneous note of their meeting with Witness 1 cautiously and placed little weight upon it.

Nevertheless, the messages confirmed that Mr Bedford had purchased substances including [REDACTED] for Pupil B, and this was corroborated by the parent’s discovery of pills in Pupil B’s bedroom, the shipping note, and the invoices obtained by the police.

The panel noted that Witness 1 provided screenshots of the online information that Pupil B had shown [REDACTED] regarding the substances. The information regarding [REDACTED] referred to it belonging to a class of drugs known as anabolic steroids. [REDACTED] is referred to as “a nutritional supplement and a legal and safe alternative of the common anabolic steroid.” [REDACTED] is described as “a legal and safe alternative to the popular anabolic steroid...”

The panel was satisfied that Mr Bedford had purchased and/or supplied oral supplements and/or anabolic steroids to Pupil B, that one of those substances was [REDACTED] and it was an anabolic steroid.

The panel considered that this was a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries and evidenced that Mr Bedford engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil B. Purchasing substances for a pupil posed safeguarding risks and is well outside the normal relationship between a teacher and pupil.

The panel found this allegation proven.

e. Exchanged texts during school hours and outside school hours with Pupil B in which you;

i. Discussed meeting up with Pupil B;

On 15 April 2019 at 1:13pm Pupil B sent a message to Mr Bedford asking "Still on for 3 30". On 16 April at 10:29am, Pupil B sent a message to Mr Bedford asking "Can u message me on this number when u r setting off."

The information extracted from Mr Bedford's mobile phone also included an exchange concerning a refund. Mr Bedford received an incoming message from Pupil B on 19 April 2019 at 11:36am stating "So how r u going to give me the money cash?" Mr Bedford responded at 11:39am and 11:40am stating "Yep" and "Need to be careful as to where and when can't be seen near school". A further incoming message was received at 11:41am stating "Okay just tell me when money comes and meet me same place when you can".

The panel considered that this was a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries, and evidenced that Mr Bedford engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil B. Meeting a pupil outside school to pass them substances purchased on their behalf, or a refund of monies paid is well outside the normal relationship between a teacher and pupil.

The panel found this allegation proven.

ii. In relation to the use by Pupil B of oral supplements and/or anabolic steroids which Mr Bedford supplied, stated to Pupil B that 'u need stop them b4 ur army medical u wont pass the drugs tests with them in system' or used words to the effect;

The information extracted from Mr Bedford's mobile phone included an incoming message from Pupil B on 19 April 2019 at 11:53am stating "iv sined [sic] up to go in the army will they test me for steroids?" Mr Bedford responded at 11:57am stating "It depends on what ones they have a list of banned and aloud steroids. [sic]", then further at 12:00 midday "Cheers u need stop them b4 ur army medical u wont pass the drugs tests with them in system." Mr Bedford then received an incoming message stating "Well I haven't had them for 4 day and it take 4 week to get out of mi [sic] system". Mr Bedford then responded "u wont be tested for months yet u b fine."

The panel considered that this was a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries, and evidenced that Mr Bedford engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil B. Giving advice to a pupil as to whether substances they had supplied to them would impact on a medical test required for their future career, is well outside the bounds of a normal teacher pupil relationship.

The panel found this allegation proven.

iii. Informed Pupil B that the School had formally suspended you or used words to the effect;

In the note of the meeting between Pupil B and Witness 1, Pupil B stated that he was aware that Mr Bedford was not in School, and was in trouble, stating “it was to do with [Pupil A], he told us in lesson that he was being accused of being inappropriate.”

The information extracted from Mr Bedford’s mobile phone included a message from Pupil B at 11:33am on 19 April 2019, then a message from Mr Bedford at 11:34am stating “Work have formally suspended me.” Pupil B responded at 11:36am. At 11:47am, Pupil B asked “And what has school said to u”. Mr Bedford responded “Accused me of gross misconduct cause iv been slagging staff of ect [sic]. Have to have a full disciplinary hearing.”

The panel considered that this was a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries and evidenced that Mr Bedford engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil B. Informing Pupil B of the suspension whilst continuing a dialogue about the supply of substances to the pupil is well outside what is expected of a teacher pupil relationship.

The panel found this allegation proven.

2. Your conduct at allegation 1.c. and 1.e. above was:

a. Done wholly or partly whilst you were on management leave and therefore at a time when you were instructed not to contact pupils;

Witness 1 stated that Mr Bedford had been placed on authorised management leave from 9 April 2019. The concerns in relation to the matters referred to at allegation 1.c. were reported to the School on 14 April 2019.

Witness 1 stated that Mr Bedford had been informed that he was not to have any contact with pupils during his management leave. Witness 1 stated that based on the information provided by Pupil B’s parents and Pupil B, Mr Bedford “delivered £150 worth of substances to Pupil B during that time”.

The panel has seen the letter dated 17 April 2019 confirming Mr Bedford’s suspension. This states that it refers to the meeting held on 9 April 2019 when Mr Bedford was placed on management leave. Mr Bedford was informed that it was a term of his suspension that he not have any contact with pupils.

The contemporaneous note of the meeting with Pupil B stated that Pupil B had said they had arranged to meet on Sunday 14 April 2019 as Mr Bedford had ordered [REDACTED] some “steroids” on the internet, and they were not due to arrive until after School had finished for Easter.

There was a meeting to supply the substances to Pupil B on 14 April 2019. Mr Bedford's communications with Pupil B in relation to the matters referred to in allegation 1.e. above all took place between 15 April 2019 and 26 June 2019, after Mr Bedford had been placed on management leave on 9 April 2019.

The panel found this allegation proven.

The panel found the following particulars of the allegations against you not proved, for these reasons:

1. You failed to maintain professional boundaries / engaged in an inappropriate relationship with one or more pupils in that you:

a. Exchanged emails during school hours and outside school hours in which you;

vii. Told Pupil A about your informal support plan;

Pupil A sent an email on 4 February 2019, asking if Mr Bedford would be around or did he "have to go straight there". Mr Bedford replied "be in room for a bit before go thu to hell." It was established that the [REDACTED] was providing feedback to Mr Bedford on one of his lessons. The content of the message implied that Pupil A was aware that Mr Bedford was going to something difficult. On the same day, Mr Bedford messaged Pupil A to say "[REDACTED] just grabbed me." indicating that he was sharing information with a student about a meeting with another staff member.

Pupil A sent an email to Mr Bedford on 13 February 2019 with the heading "meeting" and asking "how did it go?". Mr Bedford responded with a sad face emoji and Pupil A asked whether he was in trouble. Mr Bedford responded asking whether Pupil A was in school. Pupil A stated that [REDACTED] was not, and Mr Bedford replied saying "come find me in morn I'll explain".

Mr Bedford had feedback on 13 February 2019 as a follow up to the meeting on 4 February 2019. This was evidenced by a formal lesson observation proforma seen by the panel.

In a letter from the School to the presenting officer, it was stated that [REDACTED] had confirmed that following a lesson observation on 13 February 2019, he and the [REDACTED] met with Mr Bedford to discuss concerns about Mr Bedford's teaching. The letter stated that Mr Bedford was placed on an informal support plan, which was to support him with improving several teaching standards and that he was to be mentored by a colleague.

In oral evidence, Pupil A stated they could not remember what the exchange with Mr Bedford on 4 February 2019 and 13 February 2019 related to. There was nothing in the emails themselves referring to the informal support plan. The meetings were referenced but not what they concerned.

The panel therefore found this allegation not proven.

d. Instructed and/or permitted Pupil B to purchase one or more e-cigarettes for him;

Witness 1 stated that a meeting was held with Pupil B on 30 April 2019. Witness 1 stated that Pupil B informed [REDACTED] that [REDACTED] relationship with Mr Bedford began by Mr Bedford asking Pupil B to get him an e-cigarette and to fix his mobile phone.

In the note of the meeting between Pupil B and Witness 1, Pupil B stated that Mr Bedford had asked the class how to buy an e-cigarette, and Pupil B had offered to sell him one. Pupil B stated that he had got [REDACTED] another and then a third. Pupil B stated that they struck up a conversation around the gym and Mr Bedford had asked “what can I do for you?” which was how the conversation around steroids had happened.

Since the panel had concerns about the truth of some of Pupil B’s evidence, and Pupil B did not give any statement for these proceedings, nor oral evidence, the panel did not consider it could place any weight upon these comments, in the absence of any independent evidence to corroborate his account.

The panel found this allegation not proven.

2. Your conduct at allegation 1.c. and 1.e. above was:

b. In the knowledge that these oral supplements and/or anabolic steroids, were intended to be sold to one or more other pupils;

The note of Witness 1’s meeting with Pupil B stated that Pupil B had been purchasing the substances from Mr Bedford and then “bagging them up” to sell in smaller amounts to others. The note stated that Pupil B was unwilling to say to whom he had been selling them, but described them as older “16/17 year olds” who were not in school. The note recorded that Pupil B was asked frequently if [REDACTED] was selling to other students in the School and Pupil B was adamant that [REDACTED] was not.

Pupil B was asked if Mr Bedford knew [REDACTED] was selling them on to others and Pupil B stated that initially they had told Mr Bedford that Pupil B wanted them for [REDACTED], but afterwards when Pupil B was buying more, Pupil B said that [REDACTED] was selling them on to others.

In the note of the meeting between Pupil B and Witness 1, Pupil B stated that Mr Bedford only charged the cost on the internet and did not profit from him. Pupil B stated that on one occasion, Mr Bedford said to [REDACTED], “so you are making money selling on... I will have some of that” although Mr Bedford did not pursue that with [REDACTED].

The panel noted one message sent by Pupil B to Mr Bedford stated “Someone has message mi saying I’m selling drug and they have take a pic of me and sent it to mi mum so I’m keeping all mi pill at mi mate house aha” [sic]. Mr Bedford responded “Shit not pic me dripping stuff off to u is it lol” [sic]. The panel considered whether this was evidence of

Mr Bedford's knowledge of Pupil B selling the substances on to others given that Mr Bedford did not express any consternation that Pupil B had been accused of "selling drug[s]". Nevertheless, the panel did not consider that the messages were sufficiently specific to indicate Mr Bedford had knowledge that the substances were intended to be sold to one or more other pupils.

The panel noted that the invoices obtained by the police from one supplier were for purchases made on 11 February 2019 in the sum of £35.95 and on 27 March 2019 in the sum of £35.94. No response had been received from other potential suppliers. Based on that evidence, the amount purchased did not appear to be excessive to suggest the supply to others.

Since the panel had concerns about the truth of some of Pupil B's evidence, and Pupil B did not give any statement for these proceedings, nor oral evidence, the panel did not consider it could place any weight upon these comments, in the absence of any independent evidence to corroborate [REDACTED] account.

The panel found this allegation not proven.

c. Notwithstanding that these supplements and anabolic steroids were only permitted to be taken by individuals aged 18 years old and over.

Witness 1 stated that the substances were oral supplements, rather than steroids, which were not illegal but were to be taken by someone who was over 16 years' or 18 years' old depending on the substance, although Pupil B had [REDACTED] at the time. Witness 1 stated that this was established by Pupil B showing [REDACTED] on a computer which substances Mr Bedford had ordered for [REDACTED]. The screenshots provided, however, do not contain any legible information regarding age suitability of the substances.

The note of the meeting with Pupil B states that he said that the recommended age for taking these particular steroids "being between 18-22".

Since the panel had concerns about the truth of some of Pupil B's evidence, and Pupil B did not give any statement for these proceedings, nor oral evidence, the panel did not consider it could place any weight upon these comments, in the absence of any independent documentary evidence to corroborate [REDACTED] account.

The panel found this allegation not proven.

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 Mr Bedford, in relation to the facts found proved, involved breaches of the Teachers’ Standards. The panel considered that, by reference to Part 2, Mr Bedford 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 conduct of Mr Bedford, in relation to the facts found proved, involved breaches of Keeping Children Safe In Education (“KCSIE”). The panel considered that Mr Bedford was in breach of the requirement to safeguard the welfare of children.

The panel was satisfied that the conduct of Mr Bedford fell significantly short of the standard of behaviour expected of a teacher.

The panel also considered whether Mr Bedford’s conduct displayed behaviours associated with any of the offences in the list that begins on page 12 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 was relevant.

Nevertheless, the panel noted that the list was not an exhaustive one. The panel considered that the pattern of breaching professional boundaries to the extent of purchasing the substances on behalf of a pupil was serious.

The panel noted that some of the allegations took place outside the education setting. The conduct demonstrated a disregard for the School’s policies and a management instruction thereby undermining the confidence that could be placed in the way Mr Bedford undertook his teaching role. Furthermore, his conduct placed Pupil A and Pupil B potentially at risk.

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

The panel went on to consider whether Mr Bedford was guilty of conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

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

In considering the issue of disrepute, the panel also considered whether Mr Bedford's conduct displayed behaviours associated with any of the offences in the list that begins on page 12 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 conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

The panel found that none of these offences was relevant.

The panel noted that the advice is not intended to be exhaustive and there may be other behaviours that panels consider to be "conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute". The panel considered that parents would be dismayed to hear of a teacher purchasing these substances on behalf of a pupil, or of taking a pupil out for the day without informing the School.

The findings of misconduct are serious, and the conduct displayed would be likely to have a negative impact on the individual's status as a teacher.

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

The panel therefore found that Mr Bedford's 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 is appropriate, the panel had to consider the public interest, the seriousness of the behaviour and any mitigation offered by Mr Bedford and whether a prohibition order is

necessary and proportionate. Prohibition orders should not be given in order to be punitive, or to show that blame has been apportioned, although they are likely to have punitive effect.

The panel had regard to the particular public interest considerations set out in the Advice and, having done so, found a number of them to be relevant in this case, namely, the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils; the maintenance of public confidence in the profession; declaring and upholding proper standards of conduct; and the interest of retaining the teacher in the profession.

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.

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

Mr Bedford was a recently qualified teacher and had been placed on an informal support plan to improve upon several teaching standards. Whilst he may have been able to respond positively to that plan the panel considered that the adverse public interest considerations above outweighed any interest in retaining Mr Bedford in the profession. His behaviour fundamentally breached the standard of conduct expected of a teacher, breached professional boundaries in a serious manner, and showed a disregard for School policies and a management instruction.

The panel considered carefully the seriousness of the behaviour, noting that the Advice states that the expectation of both the public and pupils, is that members of the teaching profession maintain an exemplary level of integrity and ethical standards at all times.

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

- serious departure from the personal and professional conduct elements of the Teachers' Standards;
- misconduct seriously affecting the education and/or safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils, and particularly where there is a continuing risk;
- abuse of position or trust (particularly involving vulnerable pupils);

- 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); and
- a deep-seated attitude that leads to harmful behaviour.

The panel noted that it should attach appropriate weight and seriousness to online behaviours including online misconduct; or facilitating inappropriate relationships. The panel noted that Mr Bedford breached professional boundaries and developed inappropriate relationships with Pupil A and Pupil B through the medium of email and text messages.

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

Mr Bedford's actions were deliberate.

There was no evidence to suggest that Mr Bedford was acting under extreme duress, eg a physical threat or significant intimidation.

Mr Bedford was recently qualified. Witness 1 stated that prior to the incidents concerning Pupil A and Pupil B, Mr Bedford had received management advice in relation to allowing a pupil to charge their e-cigarette in his classroom, albeit there had been no formal written warning. Having been spoken with regarding this, it ought to have cautioned Mr Bedford about boundaries between teachers and pupils.

There was no evidence that Mr Bedford had demonstrated exceptionally high standards in both his personal and professional conduct or that he had contributed significantly to the education sector. The panel saw that Mr Bedford had been subject to an informal support plan.

Mr Bedford produced no evidence in mitigation, nor any statements testifying to his character. At the time of Mr Bedford's application to the School, a reference was provided by [REDACTED] of a school at which Mr Bedford had had a placement between 1 September 2016 to 30 August 2017, during his training. This rated Mr Bedford "good" in respect of his performance in 4 of the categories stated, but "requires improvement" in respect of 8 of the categories. A reference was also provided by the University at which Mr Bedford undertook his PGCE. This confirmed that Mr Bedford was developing the necessary skills to become a good science teacher and that the referee was not aware of any incident or allegations of improper conduct towards children. Neither reference was produced for the purpose of this hearing, and the panel placed little weight upon them.

Mr Bedford met with the School on 9 April 2019 to discuss the allegations raised in relation to Pupil A and provided some information regarding the trip he had taken Pupil A on, albeit failed to provide the specific document sought, that being written consent of Pupil A's [REDACTED]. Thereafter, Mr Bedford declined the School's invitation of 20 August 2019 to attend a management investigation meeting stating that "it may prejudice the ongoing police investigation" On 29 August 2019, Mr Bedford was invited to provide a written response to questions relating to the allegations against him. No response was provided. Mr Bedford was interviewed by the police on two occasions and provided "no comment" responses.

The panel understood that Mr Bedford may have been advised not to respond to the police or to say anything that may prejudice the police investigation and was not critical of Mr Bedford's reluctance to engage with the School's investigation. However, for the present proceedings, Mr Bedford has provided no response to the allegations, nor has he made any representations, despite the police investigation having concluded some time ago. The panel noted that when initially contacted by the presenting officer, Mr Bedford questioned why these proceedings had been triggered saying that he had already been through an investigation and disciplinary board.

The panel considered that Mr Bedford had shown contempt for the instruction given to him not to communicate with pupils during the period of his suspension and engaged in the same conduct which was under investigation.

There was no evidence of Mr Bedford having demonstrated any insight or remorse for his conduct.

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

The panel was of the view that, applying the standard of the ordinary intelligent citizen, it would not be a proportionate and appropriate response to recommend no prohibition order. Recommending that the publication of adverse findings would be sufficient would unacceptably compromise the public interest considerations present in this case, despite the severity of the consequences for Mr Bedford 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 Bedford, particularly given the seriousness of the conduct found proven, and the lack of insight or remorse into his conduct. 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 two years.

The Advice indicates that there are cases involving certain conduct where it is likely that the public interest will have greater relevance and weigh in favour of a longer period before a review is considered appropriate. These cases include possession with intent to supply another person, supply (selling, dealing or sharing) and production of any class A, B, C or unclassified drugs. The panel found that Mr Bedford was responsible for ordering substances, including an anabolic steroid on behalf of a pupil. That substance was not illegal, but the panel was concerned at the safeguarding risks of a teacher purchasing any substance on behalf of a pupil.

In this case, it was not only the supply of substances to a pupil that was of concern, but also the pattern of behaviour of breaching professional boundaries with two pupils, and flouting an instruction not to contact pupils, to continue the same course of conduct that was under investigation. Mr Bedford has demonstrated no insight or remorse, and the panel was concerned about the risk of repetition.

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

Decision and reasons on behalf of the Secretary of State

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

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

In this case, the panel has found some of the allegations proven and found that those proven facts amount to unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute. In this case, the panel has found some of the allegations not proven (including allegations 1.a.vii, 1.d, 2.b and 2.c). I have therefore put those matters entirely from my mind.

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

In particular, the panel has found that Mr Bedford 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 conduct of Mr Bedford involved breaches of the responsibilities and duties set out in statutory guidance Keeping children safe in education (KCSIE).

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

The findings of misconduct are particularly serious as they include breaching professional boundaries, engaging in inappropriate relationships with pupils and supplying oral supplements or anabolic steroids to a pupil.

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 or conduct likely to 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 Bedford, 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, "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." 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 has set out as follows, "There was no evidence of Mr Bedford having demonstrated any insight or remorse for his conduct." In my judgement, the lack of insight and 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 has observed that “public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Mr Bedford were not treated with the utmost seriousness when regulating the conduct of the profession.” I am particularly mindful of the finding of supplying an anabolic steroid to a pupil 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 or conduct likely to 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 Bedford himself. The panel has noted, “Mr Bedford was a recently qualified teacher and had been placed on an informal support plan to improve upon several teaching standards.” The panel has also commented, “There was no evidence that Mr Bedford had demonstrated exceptionally high standards in both his personal and professional conduct or that he had contributed significantly to the education sector.” The panel noted that Mr Bedford had not produced evidence in mitigation of his conduct nor to testify to his character.

A prohibition order would prevent Mr Bedford 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 findings on the serious and repeated nature of Mr Bedford’s misconduct. The panel has commented, “His behaviour fundamentally breached the standard of conduct expected of a teacher, breached professional boundaries in a serious manner, and showed a disregard for School policies and a management instruction.” The panel noted that “Mr Bedford breached professional boundaries and developed inappropriate relationships with Pupil A and Pupil B through the medium of email and text messages.” The panel also noted that “Mr Bedford had shown contempt for the instruction given to him not to communicate with pupils during the period of his suspension and engaged in the same conduct which was under investigation.”

I have also placed considerable weight on the finding of the panel on the lack of insight and remorse by Mr Bedford into his conduct. In my judgement, this means that there is a safeguarding risk to pupils if Mr Bedford were to return to teaching.

I have given less weight in my consideration of sanction, therefore, to the contribution that Mr Bedford 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 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.

I have considered the panel's comments:

“The Advice indicates that there are cases involving certain conduct where it is likely that the public interest will have greater relevance and weigh in favour of a longer period before a review is considered appropriate. These cases include possession with intent to supply another person, supply (selling, dealing or sharing) and production of any class A, B, C or unclassified drugs. The panel found that Mr Bedford was responsible for ordering substances, including an anabolic steroid on behalf of a pupil. That substance was not illegal, but the panel was concerned at the safeguarding risks of a teacher purchasing any substance on behalf of a pupil.

“In this case, it was not only the supply of substances to a pupil that was of concern, but also the pattern of behaviour of breaching professional boundaries with two pupils, and flouting an instruction not to contact pupils, to continue the same course of conduct that was under investigation. Mr Bedford has demonstrated no insight or remorse, and the panel was concerned about the risk of repetition.”

I have considered whether not allowing a 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 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 misconduct found proven, the lack of insight and 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 Michael Bedford 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 Bedford 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 Michael Bedford 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: 8 November 2024

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