



Teaching
Regulation
Agency

Graham Coyle: Professional conduct panel outcome

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

March 2025

Contents

Introduction	3
Allegations	4
Summary of evidence	6
Documents	6
Witnesses	7
Decision and reasons	7
Findings of fact	8
Panel's recommendation to the Secretary of State	28
Decision and reasons on behalf of the Secretary of State	32

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

Teacher: Mr Graham Coyle

Teacher ref number: 8711731

Teacher date of birth: 4 June 1960

TRA reference: 22427

Date of determination: 26 to 28 March and 10 April 2025

Former employer: The River School, Worcester

Introduction

A professional conduct panel (“the panel”) of the Teaching Regulation Agency (“the TRA”) convened on 26 to 28 March 2025 at Cheylesmore House, 5 Quinton Road, Coventry, CV1 2WT and virtually on 10 April 2025, to consider the case of Mr Graham Coyle.

The panel members were Dr Louise Wallace (lay panellist – in the chair), Mr Robert Dowey (teacher panellist) and Mrs Karen Graham (teacher panellist).

The legal adviser to the panel was Mr Delme Griffiths of Blake Morgan LLP solicitors.

The presenting officer for the TRA was Mr Alexander Barnfield of Capsticks solicitors.

Mr Coyle was present and was represented by Mr Andrew Faux of The Reflective Practice.

The hearing took place in public, save that portions of the hearing were heard in private, and was recorded.

Allegations

The panel considered the allegations set out in the notice of proceedings dated 4 December 2024 (as amended – see decision below).

It was alleged that Mr Coyle was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, in that while employed as a teacher at the River School (“the School”), he:

1. Between September 2009 and July 2014 engaged in messages with Person A via Skype and/or Facebook:
 - a. When Person A was a pupil at the School,
 - b. After Person A left the School
2. Between September 2009 and May 2014 engaged in inappropriate communications with Person A in that, on one or more occasions he:
 - a. Referred to Person A as “babe” and/or “petal” or words to that effect.
 - b. Said “I missed you” or words to that effect.
 - c. Said “I love you” or words to that effect.
 - d. Signed off on his messages with one or more “x” and/or “o” symbols.
 - e. Referred to Person A as “lovely” and/or “attractive” or words to that effect.
 - f. Referred to Person A as “special” or words to that effect.
 - g. Referred to his relationship with Person A as “special” or words to that effect.
 - h. Discussed with Person A what sex would be like for them and whether it was good.
 - i. Discussed with Person A about them finding a spouse.
3. Met with Person A on one or more occasions outside of the School premises.
4. Visited Person A’s home and/or took a photograph of him and Person A with their arms interlinked.
5. While on a School trip to Devon in or around summer 2010 he:
 - a. Sat with Person A with his arms and/or knees touching.

- b. Asked Person A to get up early to go for a walk together.
 - c. Followed Person A into the sea and said “Let’s see how strong you are” and/or “let’s fight” or words to that effect.
 - d. While in the sea with Person A he touched their arm and/or their waist.
- 6. On or around April 2011 while visiting [REDACTED] on a School trip he placed his hands on Person A’s back and/or said “that’s enough now” or words to that effect.
- 7. On or around April 2010 met with Person A alone in the art room at the School.
- 8. In or around July 2010 asked Person A to send him a picture of them in their prom outfit.
- 9. Between September 2009 and May 2014 on one or more occasions gave Person A:
 - a. Credit for their mobile phone;
 - b. Chocolates;
 - c. Flowers; and/or
 - d. Souvenirs from places you had visited.
- 10. Gave Person A a handwritten book which contained personal messages to them.
- 11. Between September 2009 and October 2010, on one or more occasion gave Person A your personal phone number.
- 12. On one or more occasions:
 - a. Asked Person A to delete messages he had exchanged between him and Person A.
 - b. Told Person A to save his phone number in their phone under the name “Bev”.
 - c. Using the codeword “squish” to signal that he was available to communicate.

- d. Told Person A that he would speak with their parent and “sort it” or words to that effect when Person A told him that their parent was concerned about his relationship.
 - e. Hid in Person A’s garden when someone arrived at their home while visiting Person A at their home.
 - f. Told Person A to tell their friends that they were going for a walk on their own while on a School trip to Devon when they were going for a walk with him.
13. His actions at allegations 1-11 were sexually motivated.
14. His actions at allegation 12 were dishonest and/or lacked integrity.
15. His conduct as may be found proven at allegations 1-11 above demonstrated a lack of insight following the warning given to him by the School on or around 27 May 2011.

Mr Coyle admitted the facts of allegations 1, 2(a) to (g), 3, 4, 5(b), 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14 and 15 (on a factual basis only).

Allegations 2(h) and 13 were denied and allegations 2(i), 5(a), (c) and (d), 8 were not admitted on the basis that Mr Coyle had no recollection and/or insufficient awareness of the matters subject to the allegations.

Mr Coyle also admitted that his conduct, as admitted, constituted unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

Summary of evidence

Documents

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

Section 1: Chronology, anonymised pupil list and list of key people – pages 3 to 5

Section 2: Notice of proceedings and response – pages 6 to 42

Section 3: Teaching Regulation Agency witness statements – pages 43 to 58

Section 4: Teaching Regulation Agency documents – pages 59 to 599

Section 5: Teacher documents – pages 600 to 619

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

In the consideration of this case, the panel also had regard to the document Teacher misconduct: Disciplinary procedures for the teaching profession 2020, (the “Procedures”).

Witnesses

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

Person A - the alleged victim of inappropriate conduct as particularised in the allegations and who is anonymised for the purposes of these proceedings.

Witness B – [REDACTED], who has worked [REDACTED] at the School [REDACTED].

Mr Coyle also gave oral evidence and called [REDACTED] (Witness C) to give evidence on his behalf.

Decision and reasons

The panel announced its decision and reasons as follows:

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

Introduction

Mr Coyle was employed at The River School ("the School") from 1986 to 2017.

It was indicated that Mr Coyle held various roles at the School within that period. At one stage, he was headteacher.

It was suggested that after he stopped full-time teaching at the School in 2013, Mr Coyle remained a regular presence on the School site and contributed to School life until around 2017.

In May 2023, a former pupil, referred to as Person A for the purposes of these proceedings, raised concerns with the School that she had engaged in communications and behaviours with Mr Coyle, which were regarded as outside of the formal teacher/pupil relationship, both whilst she was a pupil and following her departure from the School.

Person A:

- [REDACTED]

Subsequently, on 23 August 2023, Mr Coyle was referred to the TRA.

Evidence considered by the panel

The panel carefully considered all of the written and oral evidence presented and the submissions made. It accepted the legal advice provided.

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

- Person A.
- Witness B, who has worked as a teacher at the School since 1996.

Mr Coyle also attended the hearing and gave evidence to the panel.

Mr Coyle admitted the facts of allegations 1, 2(a) to (g), 3, 4, 5(b), 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14 and 15 (on a factual basis).

Allegations 2(h) and 13 were denied and allegations 2(i), 5(a), (c) and (d), 8 were not admitted on the basis that Mr Coyle had no recollection and/or a full awareness of the matters subject to the allegation.

Mr Coyle also admitted that his conduct, as admitted, constituted unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

Mr Coyle presented character references from Person C and [REDACTED]. Person C also gave evidence to the panel.

The panel confirms it formed its own, independent view of the allegations based on the evidence presented to it.

Findings of fact

The findings of fact are as follows:

- 1. Between September 2009 and July 2014 engaged in messages with Person A via Skype and/or Facebook:**
 - a. When Person A was a pupil at the School,**
 - b. After Person A left the School**

Person A gave evidence that, in the period prior to 2010, there was no prohibition on teachers at the School befriending pupils on social media and she began to exchange messages with Mr Coyle on Facebook from September 2009.

[REDACTED]

Person A confirmed that she continued to be friends with Mr Coyle on Facebook, even after a change in policy at the School [REDACTED].

Following Person A leaving the School [REDACTED] they continued to exchange messages [REDACTED].

Person A confirmed she communicated with Mr Coyle on Skype between 2010 and 2012.

Person A stated that she received messages from Mr Coyle throughout her final year at the School, both during and outside of formal school hours, and they continued after she had left [REDACTED].

Person A exhibited the messages she exchanged with Mr Coyle on both platforms, which the panel carefully considered.

In her witness statement, Person A stated:

“I found this level of contact to be both exciting (because I felt important to him) and overwhelming (because I felt we were doing something ‘wrong’ although he said it was okay). He was an authority figure in our school and church and I trusted him to be a good and upstanding person.”

Person A stated she and Mr Coyle would also sit on Skype video calls together and talk via messenger, often very late at night and in the early morning. In relation to the former, Person A confirmed they could only see each other’s face and shoulders.

Mr Coyle accepted that he exchanged messages, via Skype and Facebook, with Person A both when she was a pupil at the School and subsequently.

Allegation 1 was accordingly admitted.

In light of this admission and Person A’s evidence, the panel found allegation 1 proved.

2. Between September 2009 and May 2014 engaged in inappropriate communications with Person A in that, on one or more occasions you:

- a. Referred to Person A as “babe” and/or “petal” or words to that effect.**
- b. Said “I missed you” or words to that effect.**
- c. Said “I love you” or words to that effect.**
- d. Signed off on your messages with one or more “x” and/or “o” symbols.**

- e. Referred to Person A as “lovely” and/or “attractive” or words to that effect.
- f. Referred to Person A as “special” or words to that effect.
- g. Referred to your relationship with Person A as “special” or words to that effect.
- h. Discussed with Person A what sex would be like for them and whether it was good.
- i. Discussed with Person A about how they finding a spouse.

The panel considered allegations 2(a) to 2(i) together.

It first considered allegations 2(a) to (g), which were admitted by Mr Coyle.

The panel was presented with evidence, by way of the voluminous messages exhibited to Person A’s witness evidence, of the communications from Mr Coyle to Person A in which he made comments and used the words specified in each of particulars (a) to (g).

Person A also provided some commentary as to the context and in relation to certain messages, including that:

- A lot of their conversations were around her low self-esteem, which led to the exchanges edging into areas of her not thinking she was pretty, in response to which Mr Coyle would say she was “*beautiful*”, “*that God loves you*” and was “*especially fond of you*” and “*so am I*”.
- Mr Coyle would also say that he loved her, often alongside something religious, for example “*Jesus really loves you*” and “*so does the father*”, “*and me*”, meaning himself.
- The messages became more personal, with Mr Coyle saying “*love you*”, “*miss you*”, “*can’t wait to see you*” and asking what she was doing.
- Mr Coyle said they had a “*deep and special bond babe*” then he would talk about other teachers at the School and how they did not understand him.
- She remembers at the time thinking, “*this man thinks I’m pretty and nice*”, and feeling confused, thinking “*that I was in love with him. It felt like I was in relationship with him but also remember thinking that he was 50 years old, how could I be, and found it all very confusing and emotionally intense.*”

- In relation to a picture of Person A in her prom dress, Mr Coyle said, *“you are a gorgeous young lady, sunshine, but don’t let on that I think so, a nice secret haha”*.
- He would often make comments about her physical appearance, for example stating *“I can’t put my comments on your page but you look fabulous. How did you turn from one of my students to such a lovely young woman and friend”*.
- Mr Coyle would call her by ‘special’ names, such as, ‘babe’ and ‘petal’.
- He would sign off a lot of messages with ‘x’ to resemble a kiss. The panel also noted that Mr Coyle regularly use ‘o’ to sign off messages, which the panel understood conveyed a hug.
- In a message referencing a 16 year old [REDACTED] he described her as a very attractive woman and that she reminded him of someone, insinuating that person was Person A.
- They would talk about their relationship, which Mr Coyle called a *“special friendship”*.

There was no dispute that the communications presented in evidence were genuine and sent by Mr Coyle.

On the basis of the evidence presented to the panel and Mr Coyle’s admissions, particulars (a) to (g) were found proved.

In relation to allegations 2(h) and (i), Person A’s evidence was that she also received emails from Mr Coyle’s School email address to her personal account. These were not available on the basis that she stated they were deleted at the request of Mr Coyle. She commented:

“I can recall that these emails were even more inappropriate than the messages on Facebook and Skype. For instance, the emails were lengthy and Mr Coyle talked about sex in these emails, recalling a sexual encounter he had whilst at University. He also spoke about his [REDACTED] and about me finding a husband and then that became a conversation about what sex was like, what it would be like for me and whether it was good.”

In a Facebook message on 30 October 2010, Person A referenced a message that Mr Coyle had sent her the day before about sex, which was consistent with her evidence on this issue and supported her evidence that there were other exchanges outside of those available to the panel. The panel also noted other messages in which sex was referenced by Mr Coyle, which evidenced that it was a subject matter that featured in their communications.

In relation to this particular incident, Person A stated that she could recall visualising Mr Coyle having sex in response to his comments, albeit she conceded that her memory of what Mr Coyle said about the incident when he was at university was extremely vague.

In relation to allegation 2(i), the panel noted an exchange on Skype on 3 November 2011, in Mr Coyle expressly referred to Person A getting married and interactions with [REDACTED]. Mr Coyle also made reference to Person A's "*future husband*" in an exchange of Facebook on May 2010, adding a comment regarding whether he can "*grow a decent beard*", which he accepted in oral evidence was a link to himself.

Accordingly, whilst these allegations were not admitted by Mr Coyle, the panel concluded that Person A's evidence was consistent with the messages sent by Mr Coyle and accordingly found allegations 2(h) and (i) proved, whereby general discussions around these topics were held, albeit there was no suggestion they were explicit in nature.

Having found particulars (a) to (i) proved, the panel went on to consider whether the communications were inappropriate.

It concluded that they were.

They began when Person A was a pupil at the School and were, in that context, over-familiar, personal and highly inappropriate as between a pupil and teacher. Insofar as they continued after Person A had left the School, they remained inappropriate given the disparity in age, Person A's age and the fact that the relationship originated from a teacher/pupil dynamic.

Messages were often sent late in the evening and were unrelated to educational matters. Occasionally, interactions took place whilst Mr Coyle was attending meetings at the School and his church.

Further, the messages were inappropriate in and of themselves in terms of number, content and tone, straying into the realms of affection, compliments, relationship, emotional and sexual matters. They included references to his life outside of school.

Mr Coyle acknowledged the development of a close friendship and that he allowed himself to become too emotionally close to Person A.

The panel also took into account the private, secretive nature of the communications.

For these reasons, the panel found allegation 2 proved in its entirety.

3. Met with Person A on one or more occasions outside of the School premises.

Person A gave evidence that, during the four years in which the allegations spanned, she met with Mr Coyle outside of the School premises.

She indicated that the School was on an old estate with lots of woods around and they would meet in private areas on site that were out of bounds for pupils and out of sight from other teachers, including spending time in his school office.

They also met in person at coffee shops and at her parents' house. Pupil A estimated that over the four years they met up around 50 times, both when she was at and after she had left the School.

The panel noted this was consistent with the messages included in evidence. For example:

- On 31 March 2010, Mr Coyle sent a message to Person A at 7:48pm, which stated: *"Hey, nice to have tea earlier, are you a definat (sic) for Saturday?"*.
- In April 2010, Mr Coyle referenced meeting with Person A in person that evening.
- On 5 May 2010, Mr Coyle referenced meeting with Person A in [REDACTED].
- On 7 July 2010, Mr Coyle referenced a planned encounter the next day, directing Person A to *"bring food and your camera"* so that they *"can get a decent shot of you and me somehow"*.

Person A described the encounters as *"faux mentoring"*. She commented that, when they met, they would talk about matters of faith and Mr Coyle intimated that he was attempting to build her self-esteem and confidence, complimenting her frequently.

Person A stated they would also talk about typical teenage issues, such as boys she liked at the time, in response to which Mr Coyle would reassure her and tell her about his own relationship experiences.

She stated they would also talk about their own relationship a lot.

Person A recalled that they would arrange to meet up in person via social media and she also suggested that, when she was in school without access to social media, they would communicate by text message. For example Mr Coyle would say something like, *"Is there any chance of us bumping into each other today?"* to arrange a meeting, an example of which was included in the messages exhibited to Person A's statement.

Mr Coyle accepted that he met with Person A on at least two occasions away from the School that he recalled.

On the basis of Mr Coyle's admissions and Person A's evidence, the panel found allegation 3 proved.

4. Visited Person A's home and/or took a photograph of you and Person A with your arms interlinked.

Person A gave evidence that Mr Coyle regularly visited her at her parents' home whilst she was at School and after she had left and joined college.

When in college, this was a regular occurrence, almost weekly or bi-weekly.

She confirmed that she relayed to her parents that Mr Coyle was tutoring her for a [REDACTED] A-Level. However, Person A refuted Mr Coyle's suggestion that this was a genuine tutoring arrangement. She stated that whilst there were two or three occasions at the beginning which covered content such as this, that did not continue and she did not study for an A-Level in that subject.

Person A stated that whilst usually her parents were in the house, Mr Coyle did attend a few times when her parents were not at home and without their knowledge.

On one such occasion, she stated that Mr Coyle came to her house to take a picture of them together in July 2010, [REDACTED] She stated:

"We were in the garden and had a camera on a timer. We were stood side by side with our arms around each other in a hug, trying to take a picture when a cleaner came into the house. Mr Coyle panicked and hid in the garden when he heard the cleaner come in. I went into the house and said hello to the cleaner. Mr Coyle then realised that she was an old pupil. He relaxed and came in to say hello. I remember hiding the photo deep in my computer so that my mum would never find it, but I have not been able to retrieve the photograph."

Whilst the photograph was not retained, there was a reference within the Skype messages included in evidence to a photograph entitled 'Coyle and I.jpg'.

Mr Coyle admitted allegation 4, whilst maintaining that the tutoring arrangement was genuine.

Mr Coyle also accepted that on one occasion a photograph was taken as alleged, thought it was not retained.

On this basis, allegation 4 was found proved.

5. While on a School trip to [REDACTED] in or around summer 2010 you:

- a. Sat with Person A with your arms and/or knees touching.**
- b. Asked Person A to get up early to go for a walk together.**
- c. Followed Person A into the sea and said "Let's see how strong you are" and/or "let's fight" or words to that effect.**

d. While in the sea with Person A you touched their arm and/or their waist.

The panel considered allegations 5(a) to 5(d) together.

Other than in relation to allegation 5(b), this allegation was not admitted by Mr Coyle.

Person A gave evidence that this school trip coincided with an end of [REDACTED] celebration and involved an overnight stay, was attended by approximately 10 pupils, Mr Coyle and one other teacher.

Person A stated:

- At night, she was sat with Mr Coyle outside their accommodation, very close together with their arms and knees touching. She stated, *“we were close enough to think, “this is new” and closer than we could ever have been at school... “*. In oral evidence, she acknowledged that others were around for at least some of this time.
- Mr Coyle made her get up early the next day to go for a walk with him and told her to tell her friends that she was going on her own.
- The group also went to the beach together and were playing volleyball, with everyone in swimwear. Person A went into the sea and Mr Coyle joined them. Person A stated that she had started Jiu jitsu and had discussed this with Mr Coyle, which led him to say something like, ‘let’s see how strong you are’ and ‘let’s fight’.
- They began to ‘wrestle’, when others were around and also engaging in playful contact in the sea, during the course of which Mr Coyle made contact with her arms and waist.

Mr Coyle’s account was that:

- This was an end of year trip for the whole class, with a female member of staff in attendance.
- On one occasion, he and Person A met away from the group, outdoors, in the morning in a quiet part of the centre they were using. They went for a walk in the grounds for a chat.
- He recalls them sitting together.
- The ‘wrestling’ incident was in the context of the whole group being together. His evidence was that this was a game of ‘chase’ or similar in which all were taking part. This was on a public beach.

- There was a part of this game where he ‘chased’ Person A into the sea, but he did not recall anything other than contact appropriate to the general setting.
- He knew Person A was training in Jui jitsu and wanted to “*celebrate*” that with her.
- There was a lot of running around and participation in games such as softball, volleyball and frisbee.
- He would also have ‘chased’ other pupils within this context, both male and female.
- It was not unusual for Mr Coyle, as a staff member, to participate in some sporting activities with the pupils as he taught PE in the school, usually to mixed groups owing to the size of the classes.
- The female colleague also participated in the same activities at the time.

On the basis of Mr Coyle’s admissions and Person A’s evidence, the panel made the following findings:

- It was more likely than not that there was a point in time during the trip when Person A and Mr Coyle were sat together when their arms or legs touched.
- They went for an early morning walk together, which both recalled and acknowledged.
- Given the acknowledged context of Person A studying a martial art, Person A’s account and Mr Coyle’s acknowledgment of the context, it was more likely than not that comments were made referencing Person A’s strength and alluding to a mock fight.
- In the course of the interaction that took place, it was more likely than not that there was physical contact to Pupil A’s arm and/or waist, but noting the public context, the presence of others and the general spirit of conviviality that appeared to have been present.

The panel therefore found allegation 5 proved on this basis.

6. On or around April 2011 while visiting [REDACTED] on a School trip you placed your hands on Person A’s back and/or said “that’s enough now” or words to that effect.

Person A, after leaving the School, attended a [REDACTED] that Mr Coyle had organised. During the course of the trip, the group had prayer sessions. Person A commented:

“People would often cry during them and speak in tongues, there was lots of emotion in the room. One night I was crying and laughing a lot during the session and Mr Coyle had his hand on my back, between my shoulder blades. I felt connected to him and remember him whispering to me, ‘that’s enough now’.”

Mr Coyle admitted this allegation but in a specific context.

He stated the incident in question followed on from a situation which had an impact on the whole group. [REDACTED] which he stated had a dramatic effect on the whole group. Some had a very emotional response, including Person A.

After a while, he felt it would be helpful for her and the whole group to reduce the level of emotional response. At this point, he indicated she needed to calm herself and made the contact alleged.

When this was put to Person A, she accepted this was the context in which the contact occurred, whilst maintaining she was in control at all times. She acknowledged there were others present throughout the incident and it was an emotional episode.

On the basis of Mr Coyle’s admissions, as a strict question of fact, the panel found allegation 6 proved.

7. On or around April 2010 met with Person A alone in the art room at the School.

Person A stated there were occasions when she met Mr Coyle alone in the art room at School.

She stated this was in a building away from the main School building with one entrance, which she stated afforded them privacy.

There was no educational purpose to them meeting in this way. This was supported by Person B, who stated that Mr Coyle would have no reason to use the art room for teaching or any other purpose, other than in exceptional circumstances.

Person A referred to one such instance addressed in a message he sent to her on 6 April 2010, which records:

“Ok [] is away but I have just put the art room key behind the special security tested flowerpot to the left of the door of the art room, Safe as houses! If you don’t make it today I will put it back so don’t worry. I should be up some time after 12 noon but by one at the latest.”

Whilst Person A stated her memory of precisely what happened during this meeting was fragmented, she believed they hugged.

Mr Coyle did not admit this allegation on the basis that he could not recall such an incident.

In contrast, Person A's recollection was clear as to the fact they met in the art room. It was consistent with other contact that occurred at that time and was supported by the message sent by Mr Coyle on 6 April 2010. There was no plausible explanation for why Mr Coyle should feel it necessary to arrange to meet Person A privately in this location.

The panel therefore found allegation 7 proved.

8. In or around July 2010 asked Person A to send you a picture of them in their prom outfit.

Person A stated that Mr Coyle asked her to send pictures of her in prom dress options ahead of the event in question, which she sent these to his school e-mail address.

In response, Mr Coyle told her that he was going to get a tie to match, which he did and said that he was sad that he could not be with her.

This allegation was accepted by Mr Coyle.

The panel also noted photographs of the event, which showed Mr Coyle in a tie the same colour as Person A's dress whilst he was standing next to her, thereby corroborating Person A's account. In oral evidence, Mr Coyle stated he bought a matching tie because he thought this was, "sweet" and liked the idea of reinforcing their friendship.

On the basis of Mr Coyle's admission and Person A's evidence, the panel found allegation 8 proved.

9. Between September 2009 and May 2014 on one or more occasions bought Person A:

- a. Credit for their mobile phone;**
- b. Chocolates;**
- c. Flowers; and/or**
- d. Souvenirs from places you had visited.**

The panel considered allegations 9(a) to 9(d) together.

Person A's evidence was that Mr Coyle would buy her credit for her phone so that she could text him, and also what she described as souvenirs, chocolates and flowers.

In her oral evidence, she accepted these were not substantial gifts.

Mr Coyle accepted this allegation and that he did give her items on occasions, stating that other than the credit for her phone he did not recall spending a great deal of money on any of them. He stated that he also gave gifts to other pupils, such as buying chocolate for a whole class. The fact that Mr Coyle purchased credit for Person A's phone was also noted in a message he sent to her on 2 June 2010.

The panel therefore found allegations 9(a) to (d) proved.

10. Gave Person A a handwritten book which contained personal messages to them.

Person A gave evidence about a family trip she took abroad in December 2010, when she would not be able to message Mr Coyle.

She stated Mr Coyle told her he was going to miss her and so wrote a handwritten book, including a long message on each page corresponding to each day she would be away. Person A stated:

"I remember the book saying things, such as, 'I miss you loads' and talking about how amazing I was, and he would write scripture or have 'prophetic words' for me. I remember having to sneak the book into my bag so that my dad did not find it, as I knew that he would find it to be strange."

Mr Coyle accepted that he gave Person A this book and did not dispute that it contained personal messages to her, though he did not understand why Person A felt it necessary to hide it. He also stated he had also given personal books to other people, but not to pupils, which were intended to support their confidence.

The panel therefore found allegation 10 proved.

11. Between September 2009 and October 2010, on one or more occasion gave Person A your personal phone number.

It was not disputed that Person A communicated with Mr Coyle via text and mobile telephone in addition to social media.

Person A confirmed that Mr Coyle gave her his personal phone number and the number for another phone that she described as a 'burner' phone.

Mr Coyle accepted he did this, whilst maintaining that it was not against school regulations at the time to do so. He confirmed other pupils would also have had his number, for example for the purposes of school trips.

The panel therefore found allegation 11 proved.

12. On one or more occasions:

a. Asked Person A to delete messages you had exchanged between you and Person A.

Person A stated that there were various elements to Mr Coyle's actions which led her to believe that she had to keep their relationship a secret.

This was accepted by Mr Coyle, who stated that he did so from a sense of embarrassment, whereby he recognised the potential for it to be viewed negatively should it become known to anyone.

As well as the School, Mr Coyle stated that his friendship with Person A was not known to his [REDACTED].

In relation to allegation 12(a), Person A stated she also received emails from Mr Coyle's School email address to her personal account. She believed that that these emails were even more inappropriate than the messages on Facebook and Skype.

In any event, Person A stated Mr Coyle asked her to delete these emails, which she stated she did.

This was not expressly challenged by Mr Coyle, albeit his position was he had no recollection of making this request.

On this issue, Person A's evidence was accepted. It was consistent with the element of secrecy about the relationship. The social media messages in evidence also included reference to other communications between them which were not available to the panel.

On this basis of Person A's evidence, which was ultimately unchallenged, the panel found allegation 12(a) proved whereby Mr Coyle did ask Person A to delete emails. There was no evidence that Mr Coyle asked Person A to delete any other messages.

b. Told Person A to save your phone number in their phone under the name "Bev".

In relation to allegation 12(b), as already noted, Mr Coyle gave Person A his normal phone number and the number for another phone that she described as like a 'burner' phone. She added that he asked her to save his number under the name 'Bev', as he did not want people to see his name on her phone when he called or messaged.

This was also referred to in one of the messages included in evidence.

It was also accepted by Mr Coyle.

On this basis of Mr Coyle's admission and Person A's evidence, the panel found allegation 12(b) proved.

c. Using the codeword “squish” to signal that you were available to communicate.

In relation to allegation 12(c), Person A stated they had a word ‘squish’ which meant it was ‘safe’ (for example when her parents were not around) to message or talk on the phone. Examples of this were included within the messages they exchanged.

This allegation was also accepted by Mr Coyle.

On the basis of Mr Coyle’s admission and Person A’s evidence, the panel found allegation 12(c) proved.

d. Told Person A that you would speak with their parent and “sort it” or words to that effect when Person A told you that their parent was concerned about your relationship.

In relation to allegation 12(d), Person A recalled telling Mr Coyle that her mum felt “*a bit weird*” about their relationship and he told her, in effect, “*don’t worry, I will sort it out*” and speak with her directly.

This was accepted by Mr Coyle.

On the basis of Mr Coyle’s admission and Person A’s evidence, the panel found allegation 12(d) proved.

e. Hid in Person A’s garden when someone arrived at their home while visiting Person A at their home.

In relation to allegation 12(e), the panel has already noted that on those occasions when Mr Coyle attended her home, Person A’s parents were usually present.

She stated on one occasion, Mr Coyle came to house when her parents were not present and when a cleaner entered, Mr Coyle panicked and hid in the garden. When Mr Coyle realised the cleaner was an old pupil, he spoke with her.

This was accepted by Mr Coyle. He accepted that he had hidden in this way out of embarrassment.

On the basis of Mr Coyle’s admission and Person A’s evidence, the panel found allegation 12(e) proved.

f. Told Person A to tell their friends that they were going for a walk on their own while on a School trip to [REDACTED] when they were going for a walk with you.

In relation to allegation 12(f), the fact that Person A and Mr Coyle went for a walk during the trip to [REDACTED] has already been considered in allegation 5(b).

Person A stated that Mr Coyle told her to tell her friends she was going by herself, which she did and thereby lied about this.

This was fully accepted by Mr Coyle.

On the basis of Mr Coyle's admission and Person A's evidence, the panel found allegation 12(f) proved.

13. Your actions at allegations 1-11 were sexually motivated.

Having found the facts of allegations 1 to 11 proved, the panel went on to consider whether Mr Coyle's conduct was sexually motivated.

On the basis of the nature of his conduct and the context in which it occurred, the TRA submitted that the appropriate inference to draw was that Mr Coyle's actions were sexually motivated, either in terms of seeking sexual gratification and/or seeking a future sexual relationship.

Mr Coyle fully accepted that his behaviour was of a nature such that sexual motivation could reasonably be inferred.

However, denied that he was in any way sexually motivated.

His position was that there was an alternative, plausible explanation in the context of the nature of the School, the broader context of the contact he had with Person A including their shared faith, the intensity of their emotions and the closeness between them, which he stated led to what he regarded as a strong and intense friendship.

These issues were explored in detail in his evidence.

Mr Coyle also accepted that his behaviour, as admitted, was entirely wrong and amounted to a clear failure to maintain professional boundaries.

Mr Coyle also stated that he was very happy in his [REDACTED] at the time and had no thoughts of any sexual relationship outside of it. He had no intention of forming such a relationship with anyone, let alone a pupil, nor did he imagine that he could ever be viewed as a potential sexual partner by a pupil.

Mr Coyle understood how his behaviours could be viewed as consistent with some form of desire for a physical relationship. He also understood why Person A may have come to believe that he was acting with some sort of sexual motive towards her. However, he maintained that was not the case.

The panel took account of the fact that Mr Coyle was a person of prior good character. Clear evidence was provided in that regard, which was unchallenged.

Against this backdrop and having regard to the parties' submissions and the legal advice provided to it, the panel proceeded to carefully consider whether Mr Coyle's actions were sexually motivated.

In doing so, the panel considered it was necessary to consider Mr Coyle's conduct in totality and with reference to the wider context in which it occurred. It would be artificial to consider each element of the allegations found proved and determine whether, in isolation, such conduct was sexually motivated. They were inextricably linked.

Having carefully considered the evidence and its findings, the panel placed particular emphasis on the following factors:

- The nature and extent of the communications Mr Coyle exchanged with Person A. The panel was particularly struck by their intensity, both in terms of content, volume and the duration over which they occurred. The volume, in terms of messages but also emails, text messages, telephone and video calls, was highly concerning.

Particular examples of messages are highlighted in the panel's findings. Other examples the panel noted, from Mr Coyle to Person A, include:

- On 30 August 2010 - *"Hope you were good and went to sleep at a sensible time. It is a beautiful morning and I'd like to be sharing it with you but you are asleep. Just going to have first coffee ... of the day. I think I'll get a big mushy present for you today as you always call me mush."*
- On 4 September 2010 – *"Wherever you are, whoever you are with, whatever you are doing and whatever you are thinking remember how deeply the Father cares for you and how much I'd like to be with you to remind you of it."*
- Also on 4 September 2010 – *"Hope you are in bed asleep. I wish I could have seen your letter. It made me feel so loved and special that you wanted to talk ... Love to you from me, hugs and kisses. Please send a lovely reply"*.
- On 5 September 2010 (15 minutes after the previous message which was sent just before midnight) – *"Here's something a bit crazy, I wrote my last message but just wanted to keep on talking, so here I am. What is that about? ... Really just enjoy being with you, even as removed as this and each moment is precious. ... Night night you lovely person, see you very soon xx"*.

- The repeated references to sex and matters linked to it. There was no educational reason for such references. The panel therefore concluded that sexual matters were addressed because Mr Coyle wanted them to be.
- The repeated references to Person A's physical appearance and attractiveness, together with the personal and intimate nature of the messages. The panel noted that in April 2010, [REDACTED], Mr Coyle picked up on the fact that Person A called him 'sir' in a message, which led to an increasingly personal tone and the use of highly inappropriate terms as found proved in allegation 2.
- The secrecy of the relationship. Mr Coyle went to great lengths to conceal the relationship, which he accepted was because he fully realised how it could be construed had it been discovered. The fact that Mr Coyle continued the relationship with that knowledge was, in the panel's view, a significant factor. The panel noted that Mr Coyle had asked Person A to delete messages and took other steps to keep their conduct hidden.
- Mr Coyle continued to communicate with and meet up with Person A after he had been told in a formal letter from the School about the need to avoid relationships with former pupils under the age of 18. There was no room for confusion on his part as to what the School's expectations were and it was explicitly brought to his attention that such contact was regarded as improper.
- The steps taken by Mr Coyle to manufacture situations when he was alone with Person A, as per its findings in allegations 3, 4, 5(a), 5(b) and 7. Mr Coyle and Person A met up and made arrangements to meet up in private circumstances both on the School premises and elsewhere, at a time when they were in almost constant communication. This was, in the panel's view, highly relevant.
- The physical contact as found proved in allegations 4 and 5 was inappropriate within the expectations upon him as a teacher, for which there was insufficient explanation other than as part of an improper, intimate relationship with Person A.

For these reasons in particular, the panel concluded that the appropriate inference to draw was that Mr Coyle was sexually motivated towards Person A, either that he was seeking sexual gratification or a future sexual relationship.

The panel concluded it was more likely than not Mr Coyle was seeking and derived sexual gratification from the intimacy of the relationship, which had an air of fantasy.

That conclusion was supported by Mr Coyle's actions as found proved in allegations 4, 8, 10 and 12, which the panel considered to be indicative of a fantasy-type scenario on the part of Mr Coyle, whereby it considered he derived gratification from the idea that they could be in a closely intimate relationship.

The panel took into account that there was no evidence that Mr Coyle ever sought to advance the relationship in a physically sexual way and there was nothing explicitly suggestive, for example, within any of the communications. If anything, over time, the intensity diminished, which may have coincided with changes to Mr Coyle's personal circumstances.

The panel placed little weight on its findings in allegations 6 and 9(b) to (d). Whether in isolation or in conjunction with the other allegations, the panel did not consider they were persuasive in terms of the likelihood of Mr Coyle being sexually motivated.

The panel concluded that Mr Coyle's suggestion that he was motivated by no more than a desire for friendship was simply not supported by the evidence and the panel's findings.

Rather, the panel considered that he clearly had a specific and intense focus upon the relationship with Person A over this protracted period of time, even accounting for the fact that the relationship never progressed to become physically sexual.

Having carefully weighed all of the evidence, the panel therefore concluded on balance, that Mr Coyle's conduct was sexually motivated.

On that basis, the panel found allegation 13 proved in relation to Mr Coyle's conduct at allegations 1 to 11, which the panel repeats were considered together given they were inextricably linked.

14. Your actions at allegation 12 were dishonest and/or lacked integrity.

Having found allegation 12 proved, the panel went on to consider whether Mr Coyle's actions were dishonest and/or lacked integrity.

In determining whether his conduct was dishonest, the panel considered Mr Coyle's state of knowledge or belief as to the facts, before determining whether his conduct was dishonest by the standards of ordinary decent people.

As regards lack of integrity, the panel recognised that integrity denotes adherence to the standards of the profession and therefore considered whether, by his actions, Mr Coyle failed to adhere to those standards.

Mr Coyle admitted allegation 12, fully accepting that he acted dishonestly in taking the steps that he did to conceal the relationship.

The panel accepted that admission in relation to allegations 12(a), (b) and (f). It did not consider the other aspects of allegation 12 to necessarily amount to dishonest acts.

In relation to allegations 12(a), (b) and (f), Mr Coyle deliberately sought to conceal the nature of the relationship, such that his actions were akin to deceit. He knew what he was doing was wrong and his actions were an attempt to mislead.

That was dishonest by the standards of ordinary decent people.

The panel also accepted Mr Coyle's admission that his actions lacked integrity in relation to each of allegations 12(a) to (f). He had shown a deliberate and reckless disregard for the duties and the responsibilities upon him as a teacher, as someone in a leadership role and in a position of trust.

The Committee therefore found allegation 14 proved.

15. Your conduct as may be found proven at allegations 1 – 11 above demonstrated a lack of insight following the warning given to you by the School on or around 27 May 2011.

There was no dispute that Mr Coyle did receive a form of warning from the School on 27 May 2011, which followed concerns being reported to the School regarding his relationship with Person A.

A copy of the letter was included in evidence, albeit the precise circumstances that led to it being issued were not entirely clear.

However, this warning post-dated the conduct alleged in allegations 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 and 11. Aspects of 3, 9 and 12 may have occurred post May 2011, but as there was no specificity in terms of Person A's evidence regarding precisely when all of these incidents occurred as found proved, the panel was unable to determine, with precision, which aspects of the conduct post-dated the warning.

Accordingly, on the basis of the panel's findings, allegation 15 could only clearly be considered in relation to allegations 1 and 2 insofar as there was unchallenged evidence that communications continued after the warning was issued.

In that respect, the panel concluded that Mr Coyle did not in any way alter his behaviour towards Pupil A, which showed a lack of willingness to comply with the warning.

However, the panel did not feel it appropriate to make a factual determination as to whether or not this demonstrated a lack of insight. Rather, the fact that inappropriate conduct occurred after this warning may be a factor that the panel considers at subsequent stages of this case, potentially as an aggravating feature. The question of insight will most obviously be considered if the panel makes a recommendation to the Secretary of State, which will be a matter for assessment as of today rather than as of May 2011.

The panel therefore found allegation 15 not proved.

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

Having found allegations 1 to 14 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”.

Insofar as some of the proven conduct post-dated 1 July 2011, the panel first considered whether the conduct of Mr Coyle, in relation to the facts found proved, involved breaches of the Teachers’ Standards.

The panel considered that, by reference to Part 2, in that period Mr Coyle 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.
- 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.

Insofar as the majority of the conduct took place prior to July 2011, the panel was mindful of the fact that this proven conduct occurred at a time when the current Teachers’ Standards were not in force.

Nonetheless, it concluded that given the failings concerned professional boundaries and conduct that was sexually motivated, dishonest and lacking in integrity, such conduct could be regarded as serious at any time.

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

However, the panel found that none of these offences were directly relevant.

The panel first considered its findings in allegation 6. On the basis of the evidence presented regarding the precise circumstances in which this incident occurred, the panel was not persuaded that Mr Coyle's actions in relation to allegation 6 were so serious as to amount to unacceptable professional conduct.

In relation to allegations 5 and 9, the panel similarly considered that these allegations, in isolation, may not have crossed the threshold. However, in the wider context in which they occurred, the panel was satisfied that they did. The panel concluded that in relation to these and all of the other proven allegations, Mr Coyle's actions were so serious as to amount to unacceptable professional conduct.

Mr Coyle held a position of trust and responsibility as a teacher. He was a role model and had a duty to maintain appropriate professional boundaries at all times.

By his actions in relation to these allegations, Mr Coyle had breached his obligations in this regard. Further and most saliently, the panel had concluded that he was sexually motivated.

His actions were also dishonest in the respects found proved and lacked integrity.

For these reasons, the panel was satisfied that the conduct of Mr Coyle amounted to misconduct of a serious nature which fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession.

Accordingly, the panel was satisfied that he was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct in relation to allegations 1 to 5 and 7 to 14.

In relation to whether Mr Coyle's actions amounted to conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, the panel took into account the way the teaching profession is viewed by others. It considered the influence that teachers may have on pupils, parents and others in the community. The panel also took account of the uniquely influential role that teachers can hold in pupils' lives and the fact that pupils must be able to view teachers as role models in the way that they behave.

The findings of misconduct are serious, and the conduct displayed would be likely to have a negative impact on the individual's status as a teacher. The panel also considered that Mr Coyle's conduct could potentially damage the public's perception of a teacher.

For these reasons, the panel found that Mr Coyle'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 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 them to be relevant in this case, namely:

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

In the light of the panel's findings, which involved sexually motivated behaviour towards a pupil, there was a very strong public interest consideration in respect of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils.

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

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

The panel did not consider that there was a strong public interest consideration in retaining Mr Coyle in the profession. There was no evidence of prior regulatory concerns. Although no doubt had been cast upon his abilities as an educator, there were no references from any individuals with direct knowledge of his teaching practice. Further, Mr Coyle had not indicated an intention to return to education.

The panel considered carefully the seriousness of the behaviour within the specific context of its findings, noting that the Advice states that the expectation of both the public and pupils, is that members of the teaching profession maintain an exemplary level of integrity and ethical standards at all times. The panel noted that a teacher's behaviour that seeks to exploit their position of trust should be viewed very seriously in terms of its potential influence on pupils and be seen as a possible threat to public confidence in the profession.

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

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

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

- serious departure from the personal and professional conduct elements of the Teachers' Standards insofar as the conduct continued after the Standards came into effect;
- misconduct seriously affecting the well-being of a pupil;
- abuse of position or trust (particularly involving pupils);
- an abuse of any trust, knowledge, or influence gained through their professional position in order to advance a romantic or sexual relationship with a pupil or former pupil;
- sexual misconduct;
- dishonesty and a lack of integrity, including the deliberate concealment of their actions or purposeful destruction of evidence, especially where these behaviours have been repeated;
- collusion or concealment including:
 - concealing inappropriate actions.

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 the following mitigating factors were present in this case:

- Mr Coyle had an otherwise good record. He had not been subject to any previous regulatory or disciplinary proceedings.
- There was positive evidence about Mr Coyle's character.
- Mr Coyle had engaged with the TRA and made extensive admissions.
- Mr Coyle had expressed some regret and remorse and shown some insight. He fully accepted, for instance, that his conduct amounted to a serious breach of professional boundaries and he acknowledged the impact on Person A, offering an apology at the outset of the case.

Weighed against this, over and above the matters and behaviours set out above, other aggravating features in this case included that:

- Mr Coyle was not acting under duress.
- The protracted nature of Mr Coyle's conduct, which continued over a long period of time in circumstances where the volume of communications was also a concern.
- Mr Coyle was an experienced teacher who ought to have known what was required of him in terms of his duties and responsibilities.
- Mr Coyle was in a position of responsibility and had an obligation to act as a role model.
- He did not address his behaviour in response to the warning he received in May 2011.
- His conduct had a clear and longstanding impact upon Pupil A.

The panel considered that the conduct in this case was of a nature and was so serious that it was clear and obvious that only a prohibition order would suffice, which was conceded on behalf of Mr Coyle.

Accordingly, this was not a case where 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.

Applying the standard of the ordinary intelligent citizen, it would not be a proportionate and appropriate response to recommend no prohibition order. That would unacceptably compromise the public interest considerations present in this case, despite the severity of the consequences for Mr Coyle of prohibition.

The panel therefore was of the view that prohibition was both proportionate and appropriate. The public interest considerations outweighed the interests of Mr Coyle. The fact that Mr Coyle's conduct towards Person A was sexually motivated, albeit on a specific basis whereby the panel had not found he was seeking a future physical sexual relationship, was the salient factor in forming that opinion. Mr Coyle had also acted dishonestly and without integrity.

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

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

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

The Advice indicates that there are certain types of case where, if relevant, the public interest will have greater relevance and weigh in favour of not offering a review period.

These 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.

The panel took into account that there was a spectrum of seriousness in relation to sexual misconduct. In this case, its findings on sexual motivation were nuanced. The panel found that Mr Coyle's behaviour was indicative of a fantasy-type scenario, whereby it considered he derived gratification from the idea that they could be in a closely intimate relationship. There was no evidence that Mr Coyle ever sought to advance the relationship in a physically sexual way.

However, it also considered that he clearly had a specific and intense focus upon the relationship with Person A over this protracted period of time, even accounting for the fact that the relationship never progressed to become physically sexual.

In all the circumstances, the panel concluded this was an instance of serious sexual misconduct. It also included a child, starting when she was a pupil.

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

The public interest considerations that Mr Coyle's actions give rise to were such that this was necessary, appropriate and proportionate.

The panel concluded that, particularly considered in totality, Mr Coyle's actions were 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 some of the allegations proven and found that those proven facts amount to unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute. In this case, the panel has found some of the allegations not proven, including allegation 15 and found that some allegations do not amount to unacceptable professional conduct or conduct likely to bring the profession into disrepute. I have therefore put those matters entirely from my mind.

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

In particular, the panel has found that Mr Coyle 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.
- 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 Coyle fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession.

The findings of misconduct are particularly serious as they include a finding of sexually motivated behaviour towards 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 Coyle, 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/safeguard pupils. The panel has observed, "In the light of the panel's findings, which involved sexually motivated behaviour towards a pupil, there was a very strong public interest consideration in respect of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils." A prohibition order would therefore prevent such a risk from being present in the future.

I have also taken into account the panel's comments on insight and remorse, which the panel sets out as follows, "Mr Coyle had expressed some regret and remorse and shown some insight. He fully accepted, for instance, that his conduct amounted to a serious breach of professional boundaries and he acknowledged the impact on Person A, offering an apology at the outset of the case." I have therefore given this element some weight in reaching my decision.

I have gone on to consider the extent to which a prohibition order would maintain public confidence in the profession. The panel observe, "the panel considered that public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Mr Coyle were not treated with the utmost seriousness when regulating the conduct of the profession." And "The panel also decided that a strong public interest consideration in declaring proper standards of conduct in the profession was also present. The conduct found against Mr Coyle was outside that which could reasonably be tolerated."

I am particularly mindful of the finding of sexual motivated behaviour towards 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 Coyle himself and the panel comment "Mr Coyle had an otherwise good record. He had not been subject to any previous regulatory or disciplinary proceedings. There was positive evidence about Mr Coyle's character." The panel went on to say, "Mr Coyle was an experienced teacher who ought to have known what was required of him in terms of his duties and responsibilities." A prohibition order would prevent Mr Coyle 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:

"The protracted nature of Mr Coyle's conduct, which continued over a long period of time in circumstances where the volume of communications was also a concern."

"Mr Coyle was in a position of responsibility and had an obligation to act as a role model."

"His conduct had a clear and longstanding impact upon Pupil A."

I have also given considerable weight to the following "The public interest considerations outweighed the interests of Mr Coyle. The fact that Mr Coyle's conduct towards Person A was sexually motivated, albeit on a specific basis whereby the panel had not found he was seeking a future physical sexual relationship, was the salient factor in forming that opinion. Mr Coyle had also acted dishonestly and without integrity."

I have given less weight in my consideration of sanction therefore, to the contribution that Mr Coyle 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, 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 certain types of case where, if relevant, the public interest will have greater relevance and weigh in favour of not offering a review period. These include:

- serious sexual misconduct
- any sexual misconduct involving a child."

The panel also said "In all the circumstances, the panel concluded this was an instance of serious sexual misconduct. It also included a child, starting when she was a pupil. In light of this and the panel's comments, above, regarding the seriousness of Mr Coyle's actions, the panel decided its findings indicated a situation in which a review period would not be appropriate."

In this case, factors mean that allowing a review period is not sufficient to achieve the aim of maintaining public confidence in the profession. These elements are the seriousness of the findings, involving sexually motivated behaviour towards a pupil over a protracted period.

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 Graham Coyle 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 Coyle 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 Coyle has a right of appeal to 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 'SABuxcey', with a stylized, cursive script.

Decision maker: Sarah Buxcey

Date: 14 April 2025

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