



Teaching
Regulation
Agency

Mr Steven William Spong: Professional conduct panel outcome

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

July 2025

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

Teacher: Mr Steven William Spong

Teacher ref number: 1987590

Teacher date of birth: 06 January 1995

TRA reference: 20974

Date of determination: 3 July 2025

Former employer: Monkwick Junior School, Colchester

Introduction

A professional conduct panel (“the panel”) of the Teaching Regulation Agency (“the TRA”) convened virtually on 03 July 2025, to consider the case of Mr Steven William Spong (“Mr Spong”).

The panel members were Mrs Jane Gotschel (teacher panellist – in the chair), Mr Peter Whitelock (lay panellist) and Mrs Elizabeth Pollitt (teacher panellist).

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

In advance of the meeting, after taking into consideration the public interest and the interests of justice, the TRA agreed to a request from Mr Spong that the allegations be considered without a hearing. Mr Spong provided a signed statement of agreed facts and admitted unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute. The panel considered the case at a meeting without the attendance of the presenting officer, or Mr Spong.

The meeting took place in private.

Allegations

The panel considered the allegation(s) set out in the notice of proceedings dated 24 March 2025.

It was alleged that Mr Spong was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute in that, whilst employed as a classroom teacher at Monkwick Junior School:

1. Between 11 March 2022 and 7 April 2022, he was in possession of indecent images of children;
2. Between 11 March 2022 and 7 April 2022, he uploaded to the internet indecent images of children;
3. Searched for inappropriate and/or sexual/pornographic images on the internet of:
 - a. “Japanese teenagers” or “Japanese Schoolgirls”;
 - b. “Jailbait”
4. His conduct as set out at any or all of the above paragraphs was sexually motivated.

Summary of evidence

Documents

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

Section 1: Chronology and List of Key People – pages 4 to 5.

Section 2: Notice of Referral, response and Notice of Meeting – pages 6 to 19.

Section 3: Statement of Agreed Facts and Presenting Officer Representations – pages 20 to 26.

Section 4: Teaching Regulation Agency documents – pages 27 to 496.

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

In the consideration of this case, the panel had regard to the document Teacher misconduct: Disciplinary procedures for the teaching profession 2022 (the “Procedures”).

Statement of agreed facts

The panel considered a statement of agreed facts which was signed by Mr Spong on 7 August 2024. The statement of agreed facts confirmed that Mr Spong admitted to the allegations and further admitted that the allegations amounted to unacceptable professional misconduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

Decision and reasons

The panel announced its decision and reasons as follows:

The panel carefully considered the case and reached a decision.

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

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

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

Mr Spong was previously employed as a teacher at Monkwick Junior School, Colchester ("the School"), from 12 July 2021 until his dismissal on 17 October 2022.

On 15 July 2022, Mr Spong was arrested by Essex Police ("the Police") on suspicion of distributing indecent images of children. The Police Online Investigation Team identified the home IP address of Mr Spong to have uploaded several indecent images and videos, featuring females between the ages of 6 and 13 years old, to the internet via two KIK accounts.

Following his arrest, the School commenced disciplinary proceedings resulting in Mr Spong being dismissed from employment on 17 October 2022 on the grounds of some other substantial reason, in light of the breach of trust and confidence between the School and Mr Spong following his arrest.

Mr Spong was referred to the TRA on 11 January 2023.

On 2 February 2023, the Police confirmed that no criminal charges would be brought against Mr Spong for the suspected offending.

Findings of fact

The findings of fact are as follows:

The panel found the following particulars of the allegation(s) against you proved, for these reasons:

You are guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute in that, while employed as a classroom teacher at Monkwick Junior School (“the School”):

- 1. Between 11 March 2022 and 7 April 2022, you were in possession of indecent images of children;**
- 2. Between 11 March 2022 and 7 April 2022, you uploaded to the internet indecent images of children;**

The panel considered allegations 1 and 2 to be intrinsically linked and therefore considered them together.

The panel was presented with a crime report from the Police which identified that indecent images and videos of children between the ages of 6 and 13 years old were uploaded to the internet via two KIK accounts from Mr Spong's home IP address. Such images and videos of children that were downloaded and uploaded to the internet included:

- 1 category A image;
- 9 category A videos;
- 1 category B image;
- 2 category B videos;
- 2 category C images; and
- 1 category C video.

The panel noted that Mr Spong denied any wrongdoing during the School's disciplinary proceedings and during his interview with the Police and that no criminal action was taken against Mr Spong for such suspected activity.

However, the panel was presented with a statement of agreed facts, signed by Mr Spong in which allegations 1 and 2 were fully admitted. The panel also considered the Response to Notice of Referral, signed by Mr Spong within which he further admits allegations 1 and 2.

It was clear that there was an evidential basis for the police investigation, whereby evidence was obtained that supported the fact that Mr Spong had acted as alleged. The panel had sight of a police statement which referenced that the Police had received a

factual referral in respect of the downloading of indecent images. Whilst it had been decided to take no further action in terms of a criminal prosecution and therefore his conduct did not amount to a criminal offence, it was nonetheless clear that Mr Spong fully admitted acting as alleged. Those admissions were full and unequivocal. The panel found the allegations proved on that basis.

3. Searched for inappropriate and/or sexual/pornographic images on the internet of:

a. “Japanese teenagers” or “Japanese Schoolgirls”;

b. “Jailbait”

The panel considered allegations 3 a) and 3 b) together.

The panel considered the record of interview from the Police wherein Mr Spong admitted that whilst using the internet to search for pornographic content, he used the search terms “Japanese teenagers” or “Japanese Schoolgirls”.

The statement of agreed facts, signed by Mr Spong, confirms that he admits to searching both terms and that they indicate a pornographic image of a person who would look under the age of 18 years old.

It was noted by the panel that Mr Spong also confirmed in his interview with the Police that he may have searched terms such as “jailbait” and that he knew what such a term meant when searching it.

The panel was presented with a statement of agreed facts, signed by Mr Spong, in which allegation 3 was admitted in its entirety.

The panel was satisfied that Mr Spong's admissions were unequivocal and were consistent with the supporting evidence in the bundle. Accordingly, the panel found allegation 3 proved in full.

4. His conduct as set out at any or all of the above paragraphs was sexually motivated.

Having found the facts of allegations 1 - 3 proven, the panel went on to consider whether Mr Spong’s conduct was sexually motivated.

The panel took into account advice received that sexual motivation means conduct that was done either in the pursuit of a future sexual relationship or the pursuit of sexual gratification.

The panel noted Mr Spong’s comments in his police interview where he references gaining gratification. Within the context of the interview and the allegations made against

him, the panel considered it reasonable to infer that he was alluding to sexual gratification.

Furthermore, in the statement of agreed facts, Mr Spong admitted that his conduct in allegations 1-3 was in pursuit of sexual gratification.

Accordingly, the panel was satisfied that Mr Spong's admissions were unequivocal and found the allegation proven accordingly.

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

Having found the allegations proved, the panel went on to consider whether the facts of those proved allegations amounted to unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

In doing so, the panel had regard to the document Teacher Misconduct: The Prohibition of Teachers, which is referred to as "the Advice".

The panel was satisfied that the conduct of Mr Spong in relation to the facts found proved, involved breaches of the Teachers' Standards. The panel considered that, by reference to Part 2, Mr Spong 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:
 - showing tolerance of and respect for the rights of others
- Teachers must have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach...
- Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

The panel also considered whether Mr Spong'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.

The panel found that the offence of any activity involving viewing, taking, making, possessing, distributing or publishing any indecent photograph or image or pseudo photograph or image of a child, or permitting any such activity, including one-off incidents was relevant.

The panel noted that, whilst the conduct took place outside the education setting, the nature of the alleged conduct relates directly to the conduct expected of those within the teaching profession and the standards which they are expected to uphold. Given the significance of these findings, and the fact that the behaviour concerned related to children, the panel determined that Mr Spong's actions were clearly relevant to his teaching role and working in an education setting.

The panel noted it was of particular significance that Mr Spong's conduct occurred at the time he was a teacher within a primary school. It therefore determined that Mr Spong's actions could directly impact upon his teaching role.

The panel also took account of the way the teaching profession is viewed by others. The panel considered that Mr Spong's behaviour would undoubtedly affect public confidence in the teaching profession, particularly given the influence that teachers may have on pupils, parents and others in the community.

For these reasons, the panel was satisfied that the conduct of Mr Spong amounted to misconduct of a serious nature which fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession. The panel considered that Mr Spong was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct, which he had also admitted.

In relation to whether Mr Spong'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 likely have a negative impact on the individual's status as a teacher, potentially damaging the public's perception. The panel considered that Mr Spong's conduct ran counter to what should be at the very core of the practice of a teacher with a duty of care towards children.

The panel therefore found that Mr Spong'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 a number of them to be relevant in this case, namely:

- the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils/the protection of other members of the public;
- the maintenance of public confidence in the profession;
- declaring and upholding proper standards of conduct;
- that prohibition strikes the right balance between the rights of the teacher and the public interest.

There was a strong public interest consideration in respect of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils, given the serious findings.

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

Whilst no doubt had been cast upon Mr Spong's abilities as an educator, given the nature of the allegations in this case and in the absence of any evidence that he ought to be regarded as an exceptional teacher, the panel concluded there was not a strong public interest consideration in retaining him in the profession.

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

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

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

- serious departure from the personal and professional conduct elements of the Teachers' Standards;
- any activity involving viewing, taking, making, possessing, distributing, or publishing any indecent photograph or image, or indecent pseudo photograph or image, of a child, or permitting such activity, including one-off incidents;

Even though some of the behaviours 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 did not consider that there were any mitigating factors present in this case.

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

- Mr Spong's actions were deliberate and repeated.
- There was no evidence to suggest that Mr Spong was acting under duress.
- Mr Spong's actions amounted to a clear breach of the Teachers' Standards and raised serious public and child protection concerns.
- Mr Spong was in a position of trust. He had fallen significantly short of the standards expected of him in that regard.

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

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

When considering the seriousness of Mr Spong's actions, the panel took into account that he was not, ultimately, prosecuted for any criminal offence. The panel was also not presented with evidence of the underlying images. Nonetheless, it was clear from the evidence before it what these were. To that extent, the nature and extent of the images was particularly concerning as was the conduct particularised in allegation 3, considered in context. On any reasonable assessment, the panel concluded this ought to be considered as misconduct of a very serious nature.

Furthermore, the panel noted communication between the Police and the Local Authority Designated Officer, which stated “*due to the likelihood of risk to the children’s workforce, this matter is recorded as substantiated*”.

Whilst it may not have constituted a criminal offence, the panel nonetheless concluded his actions were fundamentally incompatible with his being a teacher. There were particularly strong public interest considerations in this case in terms of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils and protecting the public, public confidence in the teaching profession and the declaring of proper standards of conduct.

The panel was therefore of the view that prohibition was both proportionate and appropriate. The panel decided that the public interest considerations outweighed the interests of Mr Spong.

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

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

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

These behaviours include:

- Serious sexual misconduct e.g. where the act was sexually motivated...
- any activity involving viewing, taking, making, possessing, distributing or publishing any indecent photograph or image or indecent pseudo photograph or image of a child, including one off incidents.

In this case, Mr Spong was in possession of and had uploaded indecent images of children on the internet, some of which were within the most serious category. The panel considered that this behaviour was on par with the specific circumstances listed in the Advice that would militate against a review period.

The panel was not presented with any documentation from Mr Spong and, therefore, could not assess his current level of insight or remorse regarding his conduct. Additionally, the panel noted that there was insufficient information before it as to the current measures Mr Spong had put in place to prevent any reoccurrence and, therefore, it could not be satisfied that the conduct would not be repeated.

In light of this and the seriousness of the conduct, the panel decided its findings indicated a situation in which a review period would not be appropriate.

The nature and seriousness of the findings in this case necessitated 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 all of the allegations proven and found that those proven facts amount to unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

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

In particular, the panel has found that Mr Spong 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:
 - showing tolerance of and respect for the rights of others
- Teachers must have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach...
- 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 Spong fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession.

The findings of misconduct are particularly serious as they include a teacher both being in possession of and uploading to the internet indecent images of children.

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

finding of unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, would itself be sufficient to achieve the overall aim. I have to consider whether the consequences of such a publication are themselves sufficient. I have considered therefore whether or not prohibiting Mr Spong, 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 observes that “There was a strong public interest consideration in respect of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils, given the serious findings.” A prohibition order would therefore prevent such a risk from being present in the future.

I have also taken into account the panel’s comments on insight and remorse, which it sets out as follows:

“The panel was not presented with any documentation from Mr Spong and, therefore, could not assess his current level of insight or remorse regarding his conduct. Additionally, the panel noted that there was insufficient information before it as to the current measures Mr Spong had put in place to prevent any reoccurrence and, therefore, it could not be satisfied that the conduct would not be repeated.”

In my judgement, the lack of evidence that Mr Spong has developed full insight means that there is some risk of the repetition of this behaviour and this puts the future wellbeing of pupils in jeopardy. 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 makes this observation:

“The findings of misconduct are serious, and the conduct displayed would likely have a negative impact on the individual’s status as a teacher, potentially damaging the public’s perception. The panel considered that Mr Spong’s conduct ran counter to what should be at the very core of the practice of a teacher with a duty of care towards children.”

I am particularly mindful of the finding in this case of a primary school teacher possessing indecent images of children as young as 6 years old and the very negative impact that such a finding could have on the reputation of the profession.

I have had to consider that the public has a high expectation of professional standards of all teachers and that the public might regard a failure to impose a prohibition order as a failure to uphold those high standards. In weighing these considerations, I have had to consider the matter from the point of view of an “ordinary intelligent and well-informed citizen.”

I have considered whether the publication of a finding of unacceptable professional conduct and conduct 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 Spong himself. The panel makes the following comment:

“Whilst no doubt had been cast upon Mr Spong’s abilities as an educator, given the nature of the allegations in this case and in the absence of any evidence that he ought to be regarded as an exceptional teacher, the panel concluded there was not a strong public interest consideration in retaining him in the profession.”

A prohibition order would prevent Mr Spong 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 very serious nature of the misconduct found by the panel, which included a school teacher having in his possession indecent images of young children for his own sexual gratification.

I have also placed weight on the absence of evidence of insight and remorse on Mr Spong’s part.

I have given less weight in my consideration of sanction therefore, to the contribution that Mr Spong 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 concluding remarks:

“In this case, Mr Spong was in possession of and had uploaded indecent images of children on the internet, some of which were within the most serious category. The panel considered that this behaviour was on par with the specific circumstances listed in the Advice that would militate against a review period.

The panel was not presented with any documentation from Mr Spong and, therefore, could not assess his current level of insight or remorse regarding his conduct. Additionally, the panel noted that there was insufficient information before it as to the

current measures Mr Spong had put in place to prevent any reoccurrence and, therefore, it could not be satisfied that the conduct would not be repeated.

In light of this and the seriousness of the conduct, the panel decided its findings indicated a situation in which a review period would not be appropriate.

The nature and seriousness of the findings in this case necessitated the prohibition order to be recommended without provision for a review period.”

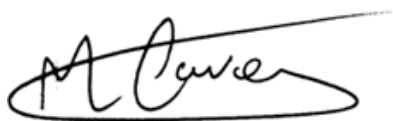
I have considered whether not allowing a review period reflects the seriousness of the findings and is a proportionate period to achieve the aim of maintaining public confidence in the profession. In this case, factors mean that allowing a review period is not sufficient to achieve the aim of maintaining public confidence in the profession. These elements are the serious nature of the misconduct found, which in my judgment constitutes behaviour incompatible with working as a teacher, and the unacceptable risk of repetition identified by the panel.

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 Steven Spong 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 her, I have decided that Mr Spong 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 Spong 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 'M. Cavey', enclosed within a large, loopy oval stroke.

Decision maker: Marc Cavey

Date: 7 July 2025

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