



Teaching
Regulation
Agency

Mrs Paula Atkin: Professional conduct panel outcome

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

January 2026

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

Teacher: Mrs Paula Atkin

TRA reference: 23447

Date of determination: 14 January 2026

Former employer: St Peter's Church of England Academy, Stoke-on-Trent

Introduction

A professional conduct panel ("the panel") of the Teaching Regulation Agency ("the TRA") convened on 12 January 2026 to 14 January 2026 by way of a virtual hearing, to consider the case of Mrs Paula Atkin.

The panel members were Mrs Beverley Williams (teacher panellist – in the chair), Mr Stephen Chappell (lay panellist) and Ms Teresa Perry (lay panellist).

The legal adviser to the panel was Mr Nicholas West of Birketts LLP solicitors.

The presenting officer for the TRA was Mr Lee Bridges, instructed by Kingsley Napley LLP solicitors.

Mrs Atkin was present and was represented by Mr Lawrence Shaw of the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT).

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 Hearing dated 27 October 2025.

It was alleged that Mrs Atkin was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, in that whilst working as Business and Computing Teacher at St Peter's Church of England Academy:

1. On or around 12 May 2023, she submitted Creative iMedia coursework marks to OCR which she had altered and/or made up.
2. On or around 18 May 2023, she knowingly submitted pupils' coursework to OCR that she knew was not accurate and/or was misleading of pupils' achievements in that:
 - a) When pulling together the sample coursework requested by OCR:
 - i. she added other pupils' work to the moderation sample, so that it supported the mark that she had previously given pupils; and/or
 - ii. For pupils where they had no coursework at all, she submitted other pupils' coursework instead to OCR.
3. Between on or around 17 April 2023 to May 2023, she did not store pupils' Creative iMedia coursework safely and securely and/or ensure that this was happening.
4. Her conduct at allegation 1 and/or 2ai and/or 2a ii was dishonest and/or lacked integrity.

Mrs Atkin admitted allegations 1, 2, and 4 and denied allegation 3.

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 6 to 8

Section 2: Notice of Hearing and response – pages 9 to 16

Section 3: TRA Witness Statements – pages 17 to 34

Section 4: TRA documents – pages 35 to 616

Section 5: Teacher documents – pages 617 to 689

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 had regard to the 2020 Procedures.

Witnesses

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

Witness A – [REDACTED]

Witness B – [REDACTED]

Witness C – [REDACTED]

Mrs Atkin also gave oral evidence and called on the following witness:

Witness D – [REDACTED]

Decision and reasons

The panel announced its decision and reasons as follows:

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

On 17 April 2023, Mrs Atkin commenced her employment as a Business and Computing teacher at the School, which involved teaching the Cambridge Nationals in Creative iMedia Oxford Cambridge and RSA ('OCR') qualification.

On 11 May 2023, Mrs Atkin uploaded the pupils' marks for Creative iMedia coursework to OCR.

On 18 May 2023, Mrs Atkin sent hard copy samples of the pupils' Creative iMedia coursework to OCR.

On 5 June 2023, the School became aware that OCR had contacted it to request electronic copies of the pupils' Creative iMedia coursework.

On 6 June 2023, Witness C told Witness B that there was an issue with sending the electronic copies to OCR.

On 7 June 2023, Witness B had a meeting with Witness C and Mrs Atkin, and determined that it could not be identified which coursework had been sent to OCR and which work had been submitted for which pupil.

On 8 June 2023, Witness A investigated Mrs Atkin's alleged conduct in submitting Creative iMedia coursework marks which she had altered, and misleading coursework. It was also alleged that Mrs Atkin did not store the pupil's coursework safely to enable this to happen.

On 21 March 2024, the OCR referred the matter to the TRA.

Findings of fact

The findings of fact are as follows:

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

Whilst working as Business and Computing Teacher at St Peter's Church of England Academy:

1. On or around 12 May 2023, you submitted Creative iMedia coursework marks to OCR which you had altered and/or made up.

Mrs Atkin admitted allegation 1 in her written response to the Notice of Hearing dated 18 November 2025. Notwithstanding Mrs Atkin's admission, the panel went on to make its own determination of the facts.

The panel considered Mrs Atkin's written statement and oral evidence which stated that Witness C told her that the pupils' grades were "*very far from their target grades*". Mrs Atkin's evidence was that the attendance for year [REDACTED] was "*terrible*" and that she only saw half the cohort whilst she was teaching at the School. Mrs Atkin's written statement stated that, on 18 April 2023, Witness C "*suggested that we looked at entering grades to OCR which were closer to their target grades than their actual coursework marks would give them*".

The panel had sight of the spreadsheet that Witness C emailed to Mrs Atkin on 19 April 2023 containing the pupils' target grades. Mrs Atkin submitted in her evidence that the provision of the spreadsheet was as a result of a suggestion from Witness C to bridge the gap between the actual grades and the target grades.

Mrs Atkin stated that she transferred spreadsheet data received on 19 April 2023 to a spreadsheet with grade boundaries for R082. The panel had sight of an email dated 19 April 2023 from Mrs Atkin to Witness C where she stated, "*I have also found an old*

marksheet for R082, I have checked the grade boundaries and they appear to be the same”.

Mrs Atkin stated that, in May 2023, Witness C told Mrs Atkin to enter marks which were closer to the pupils’ targets for pupils who had no coursework or insufficient amounts of coursework. Mrs Atkin’s evidence was that she did not raise concerns regarding Witness C’s instruction because Witness C was Mrs Atkin’s line manager and Mrs Atkin had not passed her probationary period yet.

Mrs Atkin, [REDACTED] and Witness C had a meeting on 11 May 2023 to enter the pupils’ marks onto the system. The panel considered Mrs Atkin’s written evidence that on 11 May 2023, *“I went into the exam officers room with my spreadsheet that I had completed with the incorrect inflated marks contained on it. I began to reel off the results for the 2 units to the examinations officer”*. Mrs Atkin further stated that Witness C attended the meeting late but was present for most of the meeting.

The panel considered Witness C’s written statement and oral evidence. Witness C was Mrs Atkin’s line manager when Mrs Atkin commenced working at the School in April 2023.

Witness C stated that on 11 May 2023, [REDACTED], Mrs Atkin and Witness C had a meeting to enter the marks into the system. Witness C explained that her role in the meeting was to check that the number Mrs Atkin was saying was the number being entered into the system by [REDACTED]. Witness C stated that when she arrived at the meeting, [REDACTED] and Mrs Atkin were halfway through entering the marks onto the system. Witness C stated that Mrs Atkin had a paper copy of the spreadsheet of marks and was saying the marks for [REDACTED] to enter into the system. Witness C stated that she saw Mrs Atkin’s spreadsheet of marks that Mrs Atkin used in the meeting which looked different to the spreadsheet Witness C provided Mrs Atkin when Mrs Atkin first joined. Witness C explained that using different spreadsheets was not unusual because each teacher typically had their own marking records. Witness C stated that she did not have access to the spreadsheet that Mrs Atkin used in the meeting on 11 May 2023 and that she did not check the marks that Mrs Atkin was reading out against the coursework.

Having considered the evidence before it, the panel was satisfied that the TRA had provided sufficient evidence to demonstrate that Mrs Atkin had submitted Creative iMedia coursework marks to OCR which she had altered and/or made up. The panel therefore considered that the TRA had discharged the burden of proof in relation to allegation 1 and this allegation was found to be proven.

2. On or around 18 May 2023, you knowingly submitted pupils’ coursework to OCR that you knew was not accurate and/or was misleading of pupils’ achievements in that:

a. When pulling together the sample coursework requested by OCR:

- i. you added other pupils' work to the moderation sample, so that it supported the mark that you had previously given pupils; and/or**
- ii. For pupils where they had no coursework at all, you submitted other pupils' coursework instead to OCR.**

Mrs Atkin admitted to allegations 2(a)(i) and 2(a)(ii) in her written response to the Notice of Hearing dated 18 November 2025. Notwithstanding Mrs Atkin's admissions, the panel went on to make its own determination as to the facts.

The panel considered Mrs Atkin's written statement and oral evidence. Mrs Atkin stated that a lot of the pupils' coursework was missing and she had emailed Witness C about whether to withdraw or re-enter certain pupils for resits. Mrs Atkin stated that she did not get a response in relation to all the pupils she raised queries about. Mrs Atkin also explained that it was not possible for her to check all of the pupils' coursework and that Witness C was aware of this.

Mrs Atkin stated that on or after 19 April 2023 but before 21 April 2023, Mrs Atkin had a meeting with Witness C. In this meeting, Witness C told Mrs Atkin that Witness B had said it was possible for Mrs Atkin and Witness C to submit the moderated sample via paper to ensure that there was no digital footprint that showed anything had been improperly altered.

Mrs Atkin stated in her written evidence, *"I wasn't sure what I was going to do for the students where the grades were inflated. The only thing I could think of was to proceed to collate evidence for the students coursework and I use other students completed coursework as evidence for students who had not completed the work. I didn't know what else to do"*. Mrs Atkin further accepted in her written evidence *"I stayed late and came in early to complete the sample, on the deadline I gave the work to the exams office to send off"*. Mrs Atkin confirmed in her oral evidence that she had printed the work to be included in the moderation sample herself.

The panel considered Witness C's written statement and oral evidence. Witness C explained that some of the pupils started the iMedia course late because some pupils had started school late and other pupils had [REDACTED].

The panel had sight of an email thread dated 21 to 25 April 2023 between Witness C and Mrs Atkin in which Mrs Atkin asked about whether or not some pupils should be withdrawn because they started the course late and had not taken the exam or completed the first piece of coursework. The panel had sight of an email from Mrs Atkin to Witness C dated 10 May 2023 listing the students who had no coursework for module R082.

Witness C stated that on 5 June 2023, she asked Mrs Atkin to put some missing coursework on the USB and that Mrs Atkin said she could not do so because she did not know which iMedia coursework had been printed. Witness C stated on 5 June 2023, she had a meeting with Mrs Atkin and [REDACTED], to discuss what should go onto the USB. Witness C stated that *“it became clear that Mrs Atkin was opening up her own area and not the pupil’s area”*. Witness C stated that when Mrs Atkin could not find the pupils’ documents, she opened up a window with random documents without a pupil’s name linked to it. Witness C stated that at this point, Mrs Atkin seemed stressed.

Having considered the evidence before it, the panel was satisfied that the TRA had provided sufficient evidence to demonstrate that Mrs Atkin had knowingly submitted pupils’ coursework to OCR that she knew was not accurate. The panel was satisfied that when collating the sample coursework requested by OCR, Mrs Atkin added other pupils’ work to the moderation sample, so that it supported the mark that she had previously given pupils and that, for pupils where they had no coursework at all, she submitted other pupils’ coursework instead to OCR. The panel therefore considered that the TRA had discharged the burden of proof in relation to allegations 2(a)(i) and 2(a)(ii).

The panel found allegations 2(a)(i) and 2(a)(ii) was found to be proven.

3. Between on or around 17 April 2023 to May 2023, you did not store pupils’ Creative iMedia coursework safely and securely and/or ensure that this was happening.

The panel did not consider allegation 3 as it had granted Mrs Atkin’s application of no case to answer in respect of this allegation.

4. Your conduct at allegation 1 and/or 2ai and/or 2aii was dishonest and/or lacked integrity

Mrs Atkin admitted allegation 4 in her written response to the Notice of Hearing dated 18 November 2025. Notwithstanding Mrs Atkin’s admission, the panel went on to make its own determination as to whether allegation 4 was proven.

The panel considered whether Mrs Atkin had acted dishonestly and, in doing so, had regard to the case of *Ivey v Genting Casinos (UK) Ltd t/a Crockford*.

The panel firstly sought to ascertain the actual state of Mrs Atkin’s knowledge or belief as to the facts. The panel considered Mrs Atkin’s written statement and oral evidence where Mrs Atkin stated she *“grew increasingly uneasy”* about the suggestion of entering pupils’ marks that were closer to their targets rather than their actual marks. Mrs Atkin also admitted that she told the examinations officer to input marks that were *“inflated”* and *“incorrect”* and that she knew the marks were not accurate. The panel considered that Mrs Atkin was aware that the marks and coursework that she submitted were not

accurate. The panel could find no alternative explanation and concluded that Mrs Atkin must have been aware that her conduct was dishonest.

The panel then went on to consider whether Mrs Atkin's conduct was dishonest by the standards of ordinary decent people. The panel concluded that Mrs Atkin's conduct as found proven at allegations 1 and 2 was intended to enhance the sample of coursework being sent to the exam board, despite those samples not reflecting the actual work used by Mrs Atkin to provide pupils' grades. The panel was therefore satisfied that Mrs Atkin had acted dishonestly, and that her conduct would be considered dishonest according to the standards of ordinary decent people.

The panel concluded that Mrs Atkin's conduct as found proven at allegations 1, 2(a)(i) and 2(a)(ii) above was dishonest, in that she had knowingly submitted inaccurate marks and coursework to OCR.

The panel then went on to consider whether Mrs Atkin had failed to act with integrity. The panel considered the case of *Wingate & Anor v The Solicitors Regulation Authority* which defines "integrity" as "*the higher standards which society expects from professional persons*".

The panel was satisfied that Mrs Atkin had failed to act within the higher standards expected of a teacher by knowingly submitting inaccurate marks and coursework to OCR. The panel also noted that Mrs Atkin had regular line management meetings and there was a period of time between submitting inaccurate marks and collating the sample coursework to be submitted to OCR. Therefore, the panel noted that there was an opportunity for Mrs Atkin to raise any concerns.

The panel noted the oral evidence of Witness D, who stated that inflating marks is "*not correct conduct*" and if someone had asked her to do so she "*would refuse to do it and ask them why*" and "*go to senior management and speak to them about it*".

The panel was mindful that professionals are not expected to be "*paragons of virtue*". However, the panel was satisfied that Mrs Atkin had failed to act within the higher standards expected of a teacher by knowingly submitting inaccurate marks and coursework to OCR.

The panel was satisfied that Mrs Atkin's conduct, as found proven, lacked integrity.

Therefore, the panel found allegation 4 proven.

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

Having found allegations 1, 2(a)(i), 2(a)(ii) and 4 proven, the panel went on to consider whether the facts of those proved allegations amounted to unacceptable professional conduct.

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 first considered whether the conduct of Mrs Atkin, in relation to the facts found proved, involved breaches of the Teachers’ Standards.

The panel considered that, by reference to Part 2, Mrs Atkin 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...
- Teachers must have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach, and maintain high standards...

The panel also considered whether Mrs Atkin’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 serious dishonesty was relevant. The panel considered that Mrs Atkin’s conduct as found proved, sought to deliberately subvert the integrity of a nationally accredited controlled assessment which forms an integral part of the nation’s education system.

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

Accordingly, the panel was satisfied that Mrs Atkin was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct.

In relation to whether Mrs Atkin’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.

In considering the issue of disrepute, the panel also considered whether Mrs Atkin's conduct displayed behaviours associated with any of the offences in the list that begins on page 12 of the Advice.

As set out above in the panel's findings as to whether Mrs Atkin was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct, the panel found that the offence of serious dishonesty was relevant.

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

For these reasons, the panel found that Mrs Atkin'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 maintenance of public confidence in the profession, the declaring and upholding proper standards of conduct and that prohibition strikes the right balance between the rights of the teacher and the public interest, if they are in conflict.

In light of the panel's findings against Mrs Atkin which involved dishonestly submitting inaccurate marks and coursework, there was a strong public interest consideration in the maintenance of public confidence in the profession and declaring and upholding proper standards of conduct.

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

In addition to the public interest considerations set out above, the panel went on to consider whether there was a public interest in retaining Mrs Atkin in the profession. The panel determined that no doubt had been cast upon her abilities as an educator and she is able to make a valuable contribution to the profession.

The panel considered the character evidence provided by Mrs Atkin from two current colleagues and a former colleague working within the same trust, noting that it was unclear whether the referees were aware of the allegations in these proceedings.

Firstly, the panel considered a reference from [REDACTED], a friend and colleague at [REDACTED]:

- *“Paula consistently demonstrates a willingness to step up when needed...with her characteristic enthusiasm, thoroughness and attention to detail”*
- *“Paula is unfailingly supportive, positive and sees the best in people. She...can always be relied upon to help colleagues and students in need. Her integrity, work ethic, and genuine care for others make her an invaluable colleague and friend”*

Secondly, the panel considered a reference from [REDACTED], Assistant Headteacher of [REDACTED]:

- *“Paula is highly respected and trusted by both staff and students. She is always one of the first to volunteer when extra support is needed, whether covering lessons or supervising duties. Her passion for teaching and dedication to helping students achieve their best are evident in everything she does. She also embraces professional development and is always open to learning and refining her practice.*
- *In summary, Paula is a valued and respected member of our Trust community whose professionalism, generosity, and commitment make a lasting positive impact.”*

Thirdly, the panel considered a reference from [REDACTED], Curriculum Manager for Maths & Computing at [REDACTED]:

- *“Paula carries out her duties in a highly impressive way, showing enormous care and integrity in everything she does. Her classroom teaching is exemplary and she has built excellent relations with her students whilst also demanding the highest standards of them in the standards of their work and also in building the skills they need for life beyond college.*

- *She helped guide the 2025 cohort of students through internal and external assessments and helped make sure that all assessments were conducted with total integrity.”*

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

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 Mrs Atkin. The panel was mindful of the need to strike the right balance between the rights of the teacher and the public interest

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 Mrs Atkin. 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;
- dishonesty or a lack of integrity; and
- deliberate action in serious contravention of requirements for the conduct of an examination or assessment leading to an externally awarded qualification or national assessment (or deliberate collusion in or deliberate concealment of such action) particularly where the action had, or realistically had the potential to have, a significant impact on the outcome of the examination assessment.

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.

There was evidence that Mrs Atkin’s actions were deliberate. However, the panel accepted Mrs Atkin’s evidence that her judgement was clouded by a number of different pressures at the time.

There was no evidence to suggest that Mrs Atkin was acting under extreme duress. However, the panel recognised Mrs Atkin was facing a confluence of circumstances which led to her dishonest decision making and misconduct in May 2023.

The panel accepted Witness A's written evidence that the *"iMedia course had a number of supply teachers and teachers. The pupils struggled from not having a regular teacher. There was always a handover of data and we probably did not get the best out of pupils and their work was probably impacted. This also left us open to different staff being involved in marking and storing work. This pupil group had the very opposite of consistency and, in hindsight, this allowed for the cracks to be created into which problems fell"*.

The panel accepted Mrs Atkin's evidence that she was new to the role, there was no regular teacher to provide an effective handover regarding the Creative iMedia course and the R084 module which she *"had never taught before"* and she didn't want to jeopardise her new position at the School. The panel also accepted Mrs Atkin's evidence that there was an *"atmosphere within the department"* which made faculty meetings *"very uncomfortable"*.

The panel accepted the written evidence of Mrs Atkin that she was unable to access some of the pupils' coursework because of systemic problems regarding the storage of electronic documents and IT access problems which hampered her ability to complete her role. In addition, the [REDACTED] *"attendance was terrible"*, students were *"very disengaged"*, and she only saw roughly half of the students in her Creative iMedia classes in person in her entire time employed at the School.

The panel was conscious that the wider context was highly relevant, and that a very particular set of circumstances and external pressures led to Mrs Atkin's impaired judgement in May 2023. Although the panel considered Mrs Atkin's conduct to have been disruptive to the School, it noted that Mrs Atkin showed clear insight, and this was an isolated incident that was limited to a short space of time.

The panel noted the significant mitigation from Mrs Atkin in her witness statement, character references and oral evidence which explained why her behaviour and decision making may have been adversely impacted at the material time. . Professionally, Mrs Atkin had only recently commenced employment with the School. Mrs Atkin explained that matters were compounded by her [REDACTED].

The panel was satisfied that Mrs Atkin would recognise similar issues in the future and be able to ask for support to avoid a situation like this arising again. In her oral evidence, Mrs Atkin stated, *"I have reflected on my conduct and this reflection has led me to meaningful and sustained practice and ethical decision making. I have taken deliberate steps to rebuild boundaries and compliance and such failings would never be repeated"*. The panel therefore identified that it was unlikely there would be a risk of repetition as it was confident that Mrs Atkin had genuinely learnt from her actions.

The panel particularly noted that Mrs Atkin had a previously unblemished disciplinary record. The panel noted from the character reference from [REDACTED], that *"Paula has*

been hugely supportive of her colleagues, mentoring a new starter for the 2025-26 Academic Year. Paula has also been heavily involved in extra-curricular activities such as supporting the very popular Duke of Edinburgh offer from the college including residential trips and helping with college open evenings and school liaison activities”.

The panel accepted that the incident was out of character and again noted that this was an isolated series of events that took place over a short period of one week.

[REDACTED], Mrs Atkin’s probationary period was signed off by the School on 25 September 2023, and her conduct was passed as “*satisfactory*” in her final review with a reminder to ensure she familiarised herself with the correct disciplinary policies and code of conduct.

The panel considered there was a high level of openness and frankness from the outset of the School’s investigation and throughout Mrs Atkin’s evidence. The panel noted that there was significant insight and regret on the part of Mrs Atkin. The panel accepted that Mrs Atkin was remorseful and reflective about her actions when she spoke about the impact her behaviour could have had on pupils that she taught. Mrs Atkin stated, “*I am deeply regretful of my actions, I feel that I have let the students down and the trust that the exam board puts in teachers by not upholding the values of teaching, I also feel that my actions could put doubt in the professional standards of teaching. I know how important these values are and setting the right standards.*”

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.

With the case of *Wallace v Secretary of State for Education* in mind, the panel critically considered proportionality. The panel accepted that in respect of the conduct found proven at allegations 1 and 2, Mrs Atkin’s conduct was not for personal gain. The panel accepted Witness C’s oral evidence that Mrs Atkin would not have been held responsible for poor results from this particular cohort given her short tenure at the School. The panel concluded that the misconduct, although serious, had important and particular mitigating features which allowed the panel to contextualise the nature and severity of Mrs Atkin’s actions.

The panel was of the view that, applying the standard of the ordinary intelligent citizen, the recommendation of no prohibition order would be both a proportionate and an appropriate response. Having considered the mitigating factors that were present, the panel determined that a recommendation for a prohibition order would not be appropriate in this case.

The panel was of the view that prohibition was not proportionate and publication of the adverse findings was a less intrusive measure which it could use without unacceptably compromising the achievement of the objectives in relation to public confidence and

standards. Taking all of the circumstances into account, the panel decided that the public interest considerations weighed against prohibition. The fact that Mrs Atkin has continued working as a teacher throughout these proceedings was a significant factor in forming that opinion. Mrs Atkin's current employer has spoken about her in glowing terms. The panel considered that prohibition would not produce any material change or serve any useful purpose.

The panel concluded that the publication of the adverse findings it had made was sufficient to send an appropriate message to Mrs Atkin as to the standards of behaviour that are not acceptable, and the publication would meet the public interest requirements of the maintenance of public confidence in the profession and the declaring proper standards of the profession.

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 sanction.

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

In this case, the panel has found some of the allegations proven and found that those proven facts amount to unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute. In this case, the panel has found that there was no case to answer on allegation 3 and I have therefore put that matter entirely from my mind.

The panel has made a recommendation to the Secretary of State that Mrs Paula Atkin should not be the subject of a prohibition order. The panel has recommended that the findings of unacceptable professional conduct and conduct likely to bring the profession into disrepute should be published and that such an action is proportionate and in the public interest.

In particular, the panel has found that Mrs Atkin 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...
- Teachers must have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach, and maintain high standards...

The panel finds that the conduct of Mrs Atkin fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession.

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 and 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 Mrs Atkin, 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 does not mention having considered any evidence that Mrs Atkin's behaviour placed the safety and wellbeing of pupils in jeopardy.

I have also taken into account the panel's comments on insight and remorse, which the panel has set out as follows:

"The panel considered there was a high level of openness and frankness from the outset of the School's investigation and throughout Mrs Atkin's evidence. The panel noted that there was significant insight and regret on the part of Mrs Atkin. The panel accepted that Mrs Atkin was remorseful and reflective about her actions when she spoke about the impact her behaviour could have had on pupils that she taught."

I have therefore given this element weight in reaching my decision.

I have gone on to consider the extent to which a prohibition order would maintain public confidence in the profession. The panel has observed that "Mrs Atkin's conduct could potentially damage the public's perception of a teacher." I am particularly mindful of the finding of dishonesty in this case and the impact that such a finding has on the reputation of the profession.

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

I have considered whether the publication of a finding of unacceptable professional conduct and 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 Mrs Atkin herself. The panel has noted that Mrs Atkin had a previously unblemished disciplinary record and has commented:

“The panel accepted that the incident was out of character and again noted that this was an isolated series of events that took place over a short period of one week. [REDACTED], Mrs Atkin’s probationary period was signed off by the School on 25 September 2023, and her conduct was passed as “*satisfactory*” in her final review with a reminder to ensure she familiarised herself with the correct disciplinary policies and code of conduct.”

The panel has noted character references from 2 current colleagues and a former colleague which attested positively to Mrs Atkin’s ability as a teacher. The panel has also noted that Mrs Atkin had continued to work as a teacher throughout the proceedings and that her current employer had spoken about her in “glowing terms”.

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

In this case, I have placed considerable weight on the panel’s comments concerning the mitigating factors presented by Mrs Atkin. In particular, I have noted the following comments by the panel:

“The panel was conscious that the wider context was highly relevant, and that a very particular set of circumstances and external pressures led to Mrs Atkin’s impaired judgement in May 2023. Although the panel considered Mrs Atkin’s conduct to have been disruptive to the School, it noted that Mrs Atkin showed clear insight, and this was an isolated incident that was limited to a short space of time.

The panel noted the significant mitigation from Mrs Atkin in her witness statement, character references and oral evidence which explained why her behaviour and decision making may have been adversely impacted at the material time. . Professionally, Mrs Atkin had only recently commenced employment with the School. Mrs Atkin explained that matters were compounded by her [REDACTED]”.

I have also placed considerable weight on the finding of the panel that the risk of repetition was low. The panel has said:

“The panel was satisfied that Mrs Atkin would recognise similar issues in the future and be able to ask for support to avoid a situation like this arising again. In her oral evidence, Mrs Atkin stated, “*I have reflected on my conduct and this reflection has led me to meaningful and sustained practice and ethical decision making. I have taken deliberate steps to rebuild boundaries and compliance and such failings*

would never be repeated". The panel therefore identified that it was unlikely there would be a risk of repetition as it was confident that Mrs Atkin had genuinely learnt from her actions."

The contravention of requirements for nationally accredited controlled assessments and the dishonesty found proven in this case are serious matters. However, I have agreed with the panel that, taking account of the mitigating factors present in this case, the public interest considerations weigh against a prohibition.

I have therefore concluded that a prohibition order is not proportionate or in the public interest. I consider that the publication of the findings made would be sufficient to send an appropriate message to the teacher as to the standards of behaviour that were not acceptable and that the publication would meet the public interest requirement of declaring proper standards of the profession.

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

Decision maker: David Oatley

Date: 15 January 2026

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