



Teaching  
Regulation  
Agency

# **Mr Louis Stockton: 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**

<b>Teacher:</b>	Mr Louis Stockton
<b>Teacher ref number:</b>	2080931
<b>Teacher date of birth:</b>	7 January 1994
<b>TRA reference:</b>	22839
<b>Date of determination:</b>	9 January 2026
<b>Former employer:</b>	Cheltenham Ladies' College, Gloucestershire (the "School")

### **Introduction**

A professional conduct panel ("the panel") of the Teaching Regulation Agency ("the TRA") convened on 7 to 9 January 2026 by way of a virtual hearing, to consider the case of Mr Stockton.

The panel members were Mr John Martin (former teacher panellist – in the chair), Ms Katie Dent (lay panellist) and Mrs Wendy Baxter (teacher panellist).

The legal adviser to the panel was Miss Elizabeth Gilbert of Eversheds Sutherland (International) LLP solicitors.

The presenting officer for the TRA was Mrs Louisa Atkin of Capsticks LLP solicitors.

Mr Stockton was present and was represented by Mr Philip Bown of Cartwright King Solicitors.

The hearing took place in public and was recorded.

## Allegations

The panel considered the allegations set out in the Notice of Proceedings dated 22 October 2025.

It was alleged that Mr Stockton was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, in that while employed as a teacher at Cheltenham Ladies' College ("the School"):

1. He failed to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with Pupil A, both whilst they were a pupil and following their departure from the School, in that he;
  - a) exchanged one or more messages via Instagram and/or Snapchat between 15 July 2023 and 3 October 2023;
  - b) on an occasion in or around August 2023, he:-
    - i) went to the pub with Pupil A; and/or
    - ii) allowed Pupil A to stay overnight at your flat;
  - c) on an occasion on or around 4 September 2023, he:-
    - i) visited Pupil A; and / or
    - ii) stayed overnight at Pupil A's university accommodation;
    - iii) shared a bed with Pupil A;
2. He did not disclose, or attempt to disclose, his communication and/or relationship with Pupil A to the School prior to 19 September 2023, when he had become aware that there was a risk of concerns being reported to the School by others;
3. On one or more occasions he provided false and/or misleading information regarding his contact / relationship with Pupil A, in that:-
  - a) during a meeting with the School's Safeguarding Lead on or around 20 September 2023, he:-
    - i) claimed he had not met up with Pupil A, which was untrue;
    - ii) claimed he had ceased contact with Pupil A and/or asked Pupil A to stop messaging him, which was untrue;
  - b) during a meeting with the School's Safeguarding Lead on or around 3 October 2023, he:-

- i) claimed he had not met up with Pupil A, which was untrue;
  - ii) claimed he had ceased contact with Pupil A and/or asked Pupil A to stop messaging him on Instagram, which was untrue;
4. His conduct as may be proven at allegation 3a and/or 3b was dishonest, in that he knowingly provided false and/or misleading information

Mr Stockton admitted allegations 2, 3(a)(i) to (ii) and 3(b)(i).

Mr Stockton admitted the facts of allegations 1(a), 1(b)(i) to (ii) and 1(c)(i) to (iii), but denied the stem of the allegation that this was a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with Pupil A.

Mr Stockton denied the facts of allegations 3(b)(ii) and 4.

Mr Stockton denied that his admitted conduct constituted unacceptable professional conduct or 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 and anonymised pupil list – pages 4 to 7

Section 2: Notice of proceedings and response – pages 8 to 28

Section 3: Teaching Regulation Agency witness statements – pages 29 to 33

Section 4: Teaching Regulation Agency documents – pages 34 to 266

Section 5: Teacher documents – pages 267 to 270

In addition, the panel agreed to accept the following:

- Mr Stockton's written statement - pages 271 to 277
- Character references – pages 278 to 284
- Safeguarding training certificates – 285 to 287

The panel members confirmed that they had read all of the documents within the bundle, in advance of the hearing and the additional documents that the panel decided to admit.

In the consideration of this case, the panel 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 witness called by the presenting officer:

- Witness A – [REDACTED]
- Mr Stockton also gave oral evidence.

## Decision and reasons

The panel announced its decision and reasons as follows:

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

Mr Stockton was employed as a teacher at the School from 1 September 2022 until 23 October 2023.

Mr Stockton was referred to the TRA on 30 November 2023.

## Findings of fact

The findings of fact are as follows:

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

- 1. He failed to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with Pupil A, whilst they were a pupil and/or following their departure from the School, in that you;**
  - a) exchanged one or more messages via Instagram and/or Snapchat between 15 July 2023 and 3 October 2023;**

Mr Stockton admitted that he exchanged one or more messages with Pupil A via Instagram and/or Snapchat between 15 July 2023 and 3 October 2023. However, Mr Stockton denied the stem of the allegation, that this conduct was a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with Pupil A.

In his written statement, Mr Stockton stated that he was “one of six teachers who took a group of pupils [REDACTED] and school leavers” from the School on a [REDACTED] and that “Pupil A was one of the school leavers”. Mr Stockton further stated that [REDACTED] was his “first contact with Pupil A” and then they “became friendly and exchanged messages” on Teams whilst on the [REDACTED].

Mr Stockton also stated in his written statement that he “set up an Instagram account” following his return from [REDACTED] and exchanged messages with Pupil A who was “18 years of age and was no longer a [School] pupil” as the end of the School’s term,

according to the School's website, was 5 July 2023. Mr Stockton further stated that he "stayed in touch" with Pupil A over Instagram following his meeting with Pupil A at the end of August 2022. In his oral evidence, Mr Stockton confirmed that the date in his written statement was a typographical error, and the date of his meeting with Pupil A was August 2023 not August 2022.

In his oral evidence, Witness A stated that Mr Stockton requested a meeting on 19 September 2023 so that he could "self-refer" regarding his conduct. The panel considered a meeting note exhibited to Witness A's written statement, in relation to the requested meeting that took place on 20 September 2023 between Mr Stockton and Witness A. Within the meeting, Mr Stockton stated the following:

- That he began messaging Pupil A on Teams during the School's [REDACTED]. Mr Stockton explained that most of the communications were via Teams rather than face to face and he "never communicated via any other medium outside Teams" during this time.
- Once the School's [REDACTED] ended, Pupil A invited Mr Stockton to follow her on Instagram. As Pupil A had left the School, Mr Stockton stated that he "felt that he could" follow Pupil A. As such, there was "to-ing and fro-ing on Instagram" which occurred since the [REDACTED] but was "not happening now".
- When asked by Witness A how regular his contact was on Instagram over the summer, Mr Stockton stated they were "non irregular".
- Mr Stockton stated that the conversations with Pupil A were about music and going to university, but Mr Stockton was "worried" the engagement with Pupil A was "over familiar". As such, Mr Stockton had told Pupil A to stop messaging him via phone call.

The panel considered an email exhibited to Witness A's written statement, sent by Mr Stockton to Witness A on 21 September 2023. Within the email, the panel noted that Mr Stockton confirmed that he could not provide the School with copies of his Instagram messages as he had "deleted" Pupil A.

The panel considered a meeting note exhibited to Witness A's written statement, in relation to a meeting that took place on 29 September 2023 between Pupil A and Witness A. Within this meeting, Pupil A confirmed the following:

- Communication between Pupil A and Mr Stockton started on Teams which was "friendly". Pupil A suggested they keep in touch via Instagram and thereafter, their correspondence moved to Instagram. They would discuss music as they had "similar music tastes" and Mr Stockton would say things such as "what are your plans for the summer?" or "have you made any friends yet at uni [sic]?".

- Pupil A did not have any copies of the Instagram messages with Mr Stockton to share. Pupil A stated that she had deleted the messages as contact had ceased between them through a mutual decision.

The panel noted that Pupil A's evidence was hearsay evidence which a panel decided to admit at a case management hearing. In considering what weight to place on her evidence, the panel noted that Pupil A's statements regarding messages exchanged on Instagram were consistent with Mr Stockton's position regarding their nature and content, such as discussions regarding music, and that they began following [REDACTED]. As such, the panel determined to place weight on this evidence to the extent it was consistent with Mr Stockton's evidence.

The panel considered copies of messages between Mr Stockton and Pupil A which were exhibited to Witness A's written statement. The panel noted that Pupil A provided Mr Stockton with her Instagram details in these messages and stated that she expected Mr Stockton to create an account, whereby Mr Stockton responded to say, "I will, fear not!".

The panel considered a meeting note exhibited to Witness A's written statement, in relation to a meeting that took place on 3 October 2023 between Mr Stockton, Witness A and two other members of staff. Within the meeting, Mr Stockton stated that since the last meeting on 20 September 2023, Pupil A had communicated with him via Snapchat, but he could not share the correspondence as the messages "disappear".

Whilst the panel had no direct evidence of the messages exchanged on Instagram or Snapchat, the panel was satisfied on the consistent evidence of Mr Stockton and Pupil A as well as the corroborating messages between them showing the exchange of Instagram information, that Mr Stockton exchanged one or more messages with Pupil A via Instagram and Snapchat between 15 July 2023 and 3 October 2023.

In deciding whether Mr Stockton's conduct was a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with Pupil A, the panel firstly considered whether Pupil A was a pupil or had departed the School at the time the messages were exchanged. To that end, the panel noted the following:

- Mr Stockton stated in his written and oral evidence that the School's website provided that the end of term was 5 July;
- Mr Stockton further stated in oral evidence that a meeting took place ahead of [REDACTED], within which Pupil A, amongst others, was informed that she would still be considered a pupil for the purposes of [REDACTED] despite having left the School at that stage;
- Witness A stated in oral evidence that the contract with parents was for the School year until the end of August 2023;

- Mr Stockton stated in his written statement that he was informed in the meeting on 20 October 2023 that a “pupil is a pupil until the 31st August”, but that “this date does not appear in the School’s guidelines”.

The panel considered the above evidence and had regard to section 9(3) of The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024, which sets out the legal requirements for school registration and attendance recording. In doing so, the panel acknowledged that there were reasonable grounds to believe that Pupil A would not attend the School again following the [REDACTED]. As such, the panel considered Mr Stockton’s professional boundaries by reference to Pupil A having departed the School following the [REDACTED], rather than being a current pupil.

The panel considered the School’s policy titled “Relationships between adults and pupils in college guidelines”, which was exhibited to Witness A’s written statement. The panel noted the guidance provides advice to staff at the School regarding behaviour with pupils that should be avoided, such as to “not establish or seek to establish social contact, or social media contact, with pupils for the purpose of securing a friendship or to pursue or strengthen a relationship”. The policy defined "children", "young people" and "pupils" as children under the age of 18 years and stated that “although this policy is primarily concerned with pupils attending College, its guidance applies to relationships at the point at which Pupils are leaving school and in the period immediately following”.

Mr Stockton stated in his written statement that the School’s policy was silent as to what the period “immediately following” pupils leaving the School meant, and in particular what period it covers. However, Mr Stockton also stated in his written statement that he recognised that the "period immediately following leaving school" is a sensitive time and he accepted that a teacher’s responsibility for maintaining clear boundaries “does not end the moment a pupil receives their results”. The panel considered that the months following Pupil A’s departure from the School could reasonably be considered to be the period immediately following.

Mr Stockton stated in his written statement that he does “not accept” that the contact he had with Pupil A over social media was a failure to maintain professional boundaries. Additionally, Mr Stockton stated he was not in breach of the School’s policy, as Pupil A was 18 years of age, “had completed her studies” and therefore was not within the scope of the policy. The panel did not consider it to be a reasonable position that 18-year-old pupils at the School should be excluded from the expectation to maintain appropriate professional boundaries, notwithstanding that the School’s policy [REDACTED].

The panel was satisfied that Mr Stockton’s conduct in exchanging messages with Pupil A via Instagram and/or Snapchat between 15 July 2023 and 3 October 2023 constituted a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries following her departure from the School. The panel noted that message exchanges between Pupil A and Mr Stockton began on Teams during [REDACTED], when a teacher-pupil professional relationship

existed, and continued on social media platforms very shortly after Pupil A left the School. The panel considered it inappropriate for Mr Stockton to develop the level of engagement he did with Pupil A in such a short period following Pupil A's departure, as an imbalance of power dynamics remained between them.

The panel therefore found allegation 1(a) proven.

**b) on an occasion in or around August 2023, you:-**

- i) went to the pub with Pupil A; and/or**
- ii) allowed Pupil A to stay overnight at your flat;**

Mr Stockton admitted that he went to the pub with Pupil A and allowed Pupil A to stay overnight at his flat on an occasion in or around August 2023. However, Mr Stockton denied the stem of the allegation, that this conduct was a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with Pupil A.

Mr Stockton stated in his written statement that, at the end of August 2022, he met Pupil A in Cheltenham, they “visited a local pub”, Pupil A “spent the night” and “slept on the sofa” at his flat as she “missed the last train home”. Mr Stockton stated in his oral evidence that the date outlined in his statement was a typographical error, and the date of the visit was August 2023, not August 2022.

The panel considered a meeting note exhibited to Witness A’s written statement, in relation to a meeting that took place on 3 October 2023 between Mr Stockton, Witness A and two other members of staff. Within the meeting, Mr Stockton stated that Pupil A “visited Cheltenham” and they both went to the “Frog and Fiddle pub in town” and “had a couple of drinks”. Mr Stockton further confirmed in the meeting that nobody else from the School was in attendance and Pupil A stayed at his flat that evening.

The panel also considered a meeting note exhibited to Witness A’s written statement, in relation to a meeting that took place on 20 October 2023 between Mr Stockton, and two members of staff at the School. Mr Stockton stated at the meeting that Pupil A “fell asleep on the sofa listening to music” when she stayed at his flat, which was “out of convenience” as it was a “long enough distance to not want to travel on that same day”.

The panel considered a meeting note exhibited to Witness A’s written statement, in relation to a meeting that took place on 29 September 2023 between Pupil A and Witness A. Within this meeting, Pupil A stated that she had not met Mr Stockton at any point over the summer. The panel noted that this evidence was hearsay evidence which a panel decided to admit at a case management hearing. As the evidence was inconsistent with other evidence presented in relation to whether or not Pupil A and Mr Stockton met on or around August 2023, the panel considered that it carried less weight than other evidence that the panel had tested.

The panel considered that Mr Stockton's evidence in relation to meeting Pupil A in or around August 2023 was consistent at the later part of the meeting notes of 3 October 2023 and throughout 20 October 2023 as well as in his written and oral evidence. As such, the panel was satisfied that Mr Stockton went to the pub with Pupil A and allowed her to stay overnight at his flat, on an occasion on or around August 2023.

As referred to in allegation 1(a), the panel noted that there were reasonable grounds to believe that Pupil A would not attend the School again following the [REDACTED]. As the facts of allegations 1(b)(i) and 1(b)(ii) occurred on or around August 2023, after the [REDACTED], the panel considered Mr Stockton's professional boundaries by reference to Pupil A having departed the School following the [REDACTED], rather than being a current pupil.

The panel was satisfied that Mr Stockton's conduct in meeting Pupil A at a pub and allowing her to stay the night in or around August 2023 constituted a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with Pupil A following her departure from the School. The panel noted that Mr Stockton's interaction with Pupil A had originated during the [REDACTED], when a teacher-pupil professional relationship existed, and that this social meeting occurred within a month of Pupil A's departure from the School. The panel considered it inappropriate for Mr Stockton to be in private social situations with Pupil A in August 2023, as an imbalance of power dynamics remained between them.

The panel therefore found allegations 1(b)(i) and (ii) proven.

**c) on an occasion on or around 4 September 2023, you:-**

- i) visited Pupil A; and / or**
- ii) stayed overnight at Pupil A's university accommodation;**
- iii) shared a bed with Pupil A;**

Mr Stockton admitted that he visited Pupil A, stayed overnight at Pupil A's university accommodation and shared a bed with Pupil A on an occasion on or around 4 September 2023. However, Mr Stockton denied the stem of the allegation, that this conduct was a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with Pupil A.

Mr Stockton stated in his written statement that he met Pupil A on 4 September 2022 when he "visited her" at university in London and agreed to "spend the night" at her student flat "assuming there would be a sofa or other suitable place to sleep", but this was not the case. As such, Mr Stockton stated that he "initially slept on the floor" and then occupied "the edge of the bed" with Pupil A. Mr Stockton stated in oral evidence that the date referred to in his written statement was an error and the date on which he visited Pupil A was 4 September 2023, not 2022.

The panel considered a meeting note exhibited to Witness A's written statement, in relation to a meeting that took place on 3 October 2023 between Mr Stockton, Witness A and two other members of staff. Within the meeting, Mr Stockton stated that he met Pupil A in London, after she "just moved there and was settling in" and he stayed for "one night".

The panel also considered a meeting note exhibited to Witness A's written statement, in relation to a meeting that took place on 20 October 2023 between Mr Stockton, and two members of staff at the School. When asked within the meeting whether he stayed in Pupil A's university accommodation, Mr Stockton responded "I did". Mr Stockton further stated in the meeting that he was "initially" on the floor but then went in Pupil A's bed and this was a "platonic thing" and was "out of convenience more than anything" as it was a "long enough distance to not want to travel on that same day".

The panel considered a meeting note exhibited to Witness A's written statement, in relation to a meeting that took place on 29 September 2023 between Pupil A and Witness A. Within this meeting, Pupil A stated that she had not met Mr Stockton at any point over the summer. As outlined at allegation 1(b), the panel noted that this evidence was hearsay evidence which a panel decided to admit at a case management hearing. As the evidence was inconsistent with other evidence presented in relation to whether or not Pupil A and Mr Stockton met on or around 4 September 2023, the panel considered that it carried less weight than other evidence that the panel had tested.

The panel considered that Mr Stockton's account of events on or around 4 September 2023 was consistent throughout the later part of the meeting notes of 3 October 2023 and throughout 20 October 2023 as well as in Mr Stockton's written and oral evidence. As such, the panel was satisfied that Mr Stockton visited Pupil A, stayed overnight at Pupil A's university accommodation and shared a bed with Pupil A on an occasion on or around 4 September 2023.

As referred to in allegation 1(a) and 1(b), the panel noted that there were reasonable grounds to believe that Pupil A would not attend the School again following the [REDACTED]. As the facts of allegations 1(c) occurred on or around 4 September 2023, after the [REDACTED], the panel considered Mr Stockton's professional boundaries by reference to Pupil A having departed the School following the [REDACTED], rather than being a current pupil.

The panel was satisfied that Mr Stockton's conduct in visiting Pupil A, staying overnight at Pupil A's university accommodation and sharing a bed with Pupil A constituted a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with Pupil A, following her departure from the School. The panel noted that Mr Stockton's interaction with Pupil A had originated during the [REDACTED], when a teacher-pupil professional relationship existed, and that this social meeting occurred within two months of Pupil A's departure from the School. The panel considered it inappropriate for Mr Stockton to be in private

social situations with Pupil A on or around 4 September 2023, as an imbalance of power dynamics remained between them.

The panel therefore found allegations 1(c)(i), 1c(ii) and 1c(iii) proven.

**2. You did not disclose, or attempt to disclose, your communication and/or relationship with Pupil A to the School prior to 19 September 2023, when you had become aware that there was a risk of concerns being reported to the School by others;**

Mr Stockton admitted allegation 2.

Mr Stockton stated in his written statement that on 19 September 2023 he was “made aware by Pupil A that Pupil M” had informed the School of his interactions with Pupil A.

Witness A stated in his written statement that concerns were received on 19 September 2023 from Pupil M regarding a relationship between Pupil A and Mr Stockton. The panel considered a note of the concerns raised by Pupil M which were exhibited to Witness A’s written statement.

In his oral evidence, Witness A stated that on 19 September 2023 Mr Stockton requested a meeting so that he could “self-refer” regarding his conduct. The panel considered a meeting note exhibited to Witness A’s written statement, in relation to the requested meeting that took place on 20 September 2023 between Mr Stockton and Witness A. Witness A stated in oral evidence that this meeting was the first time that Mr Stockton disclosed some of his communication and relationship with Pupil A to the School.

The panel considered copies of messages between Mr Stockton and Pupil A which were exhibited to Witness A’s written statement, which were provided by Pupil M on 19 September 2023. The panel noted that Mr Stockton was aware that concerns were potentially being raised by this time, as he stated to Pupil A “if [Pupil K] tells all then I’m 100% screwed”.

The panel considered the School’s policy titled “Staff Code of Conduct Policy”, which stated the following:

“Low-level concerns about a member of staff should be reported as outlined in the Safeguarding Policy. College aims to create an environment where staff are encouraged and feel confident to self-refer, where, for example, they have found themselves in a situation which could be misinterpreted, might appear compromising to others, and/or on reflection they believe they have behaved in such a way that they consider falls below the expected professional standards.”

The panel considered that the School's staff code of conduct in relation to disclosing information to the School regarding any circumstances that may be misinterpreted or compromising to be clear.

The panel was satisfied that Mr Stockton and Witness A's evidence was consistent and was corroborated by the contemporaneous documentation exhibited to Witness A's written statement. The panel was satisfied that Mr Stockton first disclosed some information to the School, regarding his relationship and communication with Pupil A, within the meeting on 20 September 2023. As such, the panel was satisfied that Mr Stockton did not disclose, or attempt to disclose, his communication or relationship with Pupil A to the School prior to 19 September 2023, when he had become aware that there was a risk of concerns being reported to the School by others.

The panel therefore found allegation 2 proven.

**3. On one or more occasions you provided false and/or misleading information regarding your contact / relationship with Pupil A, in that:-**

**a) during a meeting with the School's Safeguarding Lead on or around 20 September 2023, you:-**

- i. claimed you had not met up with Pupil A, which was untrue;**
- ii. claimed you had ceased contact with Pupil A and/or asked Pupil A to stop messaging you, which was untrue;**

Mr Stockton admitted allegations 3(a)(i) and 3(a)(ii).

In his written statement, Mr Stockton stated that he "accepted" that he was not "fully transparent" in the meeting on 20 September 2023 as he was "in a state of professional panic" and wanted to protect Pupil A's privacy. Mr Stockton further stated that in hindsight, it was a "naïve error of judgment" and he wrongly prioritised Pupil A's request for privacy over his duty of transparency.

The panel considered the meeting note exhibited to Witness A's written statement, in relation to a meeting that took place on 20 September 2023 between Mr Stockton and Witness A. Within the meeting, Witness A asked Mr Stockton if he had met up with Pupil A, in response Mr Stockton "shook his head" and then said no. As Witness A felt Mr Stockton's response was unclear, he asked again, to which Mr Stockton again responded "no". Mr Stockton also stated that he told Pupil A to stop messaging him during a "phone call" and that messages on Instagram were "not happening now".

Mr Stockton stated in oral evidence that he had remained in contact with Pupil A following the meeting on 20 September 2023.

In his written statement, Mr Stockton also stated that Pupil A messaged him on or around 30 September 2023 and he replied that he was “worried that cutting off contact so abruptly may cause her difficulties”.

The panel considered the meeting note exhibited to Witness A’s written statement, in relation to a meeting that took place on 3 October 2023 between Mr Stockton, Witness A and two members of staff. The panel noted that Mr Stockton stated later in this meeting that he did in fact visit Pupil A to “see how she was settling in” and stayed over at her university accommodation. The panel further noted that Mr Stockton also confirmed that he “still [had] contact” with Pupil A “but no kind of relationship”.

The panel also considered a meeting note exhibited to Witness A’s written statement, in relation to a meeting that took place on 20 October 2023 between Mr Stockton, and two members of staff at the School. Mr Stockton stated in this meeting that he had met up with Pupil A on two separate occasions and Pupil A had been in contact with him.

The panel considered a meeting note exhibited to Witness A’s written statement, in relation to a meeting that took place on 29 September 2023 between Pupil A and Witness A. Within this meeting, Pupil A stated that communication with Mr Stockton had ceased due to a “mutual decision”. As the hearsay evidence was inconsistent with Mr Stockton’s evidence, in relation to whether Mr Stockton told Pupil A to stop messaging him, the panel considered that it carried less weight than evidence that the panel had tested.

The panel was satisfied that Mr Stockton claimed he had asked Pupil A to stop messaging him on Instagram during a meeting with the School’s Safeguarding Lead on 20 September 2023, in light of Mr Stockton’s evidence and the meeting note. However, the panel was not satisfied that it had been proven on the balance of probabilities that this claim was untrue, as Mr Stockton’s written and oral evidence stated that he had asked Pupil A to stop messaging him, and a draft of this message was provided by Mr Stockton in an email to Witness A on 21 September 2023.

The panel was satisfied that, during a meeting with the School’s Safeguarding Lead on or around 20 September 2023, Mr Stockton claimed he had not met up with Pupil A and that he had ceased contact with Pupil A, as this was supported by Mr Stockton’s evidence and the contemporaneous meeting note. The panel was further satisfied that both claims by Mr Stockton were untrue, as Mr Stockton stated in later meetings on 3 October 2023 and 20 October 2023 that he had in fact met up with Pupil A and had not ceased contact, which was supported by the contemporaneous meeting notes and Mr Stockton’s written and oral evidence. As such, the panel was satisfied that Mr Stockton provided the School with false and misleading information regarding his contact and relationship with Pupil A.

The panel therefore found allegations 3(a)(i) and (ii) proven.

**b) during a meeting with the School's Safeguarding Lead on or around 3 October 2023, you:-**

- i) claimed you had not met up with Pupil A, which was untrue;**
- ii) claimed you had ceased contact with Pupil A and/or asked Pupil A to stop messaging you on Instagram, which was untrue;**

Mr Stockton admitted allegation 3(b)(i) but denied allegation 3(b)(ii).

Mr Stockton stated in his written statement that, at the meeting on 3 October 2023, he was "still conflicted" as "it was clear the school were taking this matter seriously" and Pupil A's request for privacy was "hanging heavily" on his conscience. Mr Stockton further stated that "when it became clear" that the School were aware he had met Pupil A, he decided to put his job before his "conscience".

In his oral evidence, Mr Stockton stated that he "initially maintained" in the meeting on 3 October 2023, that he did not meet up with Pupil A, as he was "terrified" given he had already provided inaccurate information in the earlier meeting on 20 September 2023. Mr Stockton further stated in oral evidence that he told the truth in the meeting on 3 October 2023 once he became aware that Witness A had evidence which took the choice out of his hands and provided clarity for him to be "fully transparent", which was a "massive relief" to him. Mr Stockton also stated in his oral evidence that he agreed that his initial responses in the meeting were "false and misleading".

The panel considered the meeting note exhibited to Witness A's written statement, in relation to a meeting that took place on 3 October 2023 between Mr Stockton, Witness A and two members of staff. During the meeting, Mr Stockton stated it was him that ended the messages on Instagram with Pupil A as "he was keen to end it promptly". When questioned by Witness A as to whether Mr Stockton had been in contact with Pupil A since he requested their messaging to stop, he responded to say "no". Additionally, when questioned by Witness A as to whether he had met up with Pupil A "in the days or weeks post the [REDACTED]", Mr Stockton also responded with "no".

Later in the meeting, following Mr Stockton's initial responses, Witness A informed Mr Stockton of the evidence he held, which led Mr Stockton to change his response and confirm that he did in fact visit Pupil A to "see how she was settling in" and that he stayed over at her accommodation. The panel further noted that Mr Stockton also changed his position in the meeting to confirm that he "still [had] contact" with Pupil A "but no kind of relationship".

The panel also considered a meeting note exhibited to Witness A's written statement, in relation to a meeting that took place on 20 October 2023 between Mr Stockton, and two members of staff at the School. Mr Stockton stated in this meeting that he had met up with Pupil A on two separate occasions and Pupil A had been in contact with him.

The panel considered a meeting note exhibited to Witness A's written statement, in relation to a meeting that took place on 29 September 2023 between Pupil A and Witness A. Within this meeting, Pupil A stated that communication with Mr Stockton had ceased due to a "mutual decision". As Pupil A's hearsay evidence was inconsistent with Mr Stockton's evidence, in relation to whether Mr Stockton told Pupil A to stop messaging him or it was a mutual decision, the panel considered that it carried less weight than evidence that the panel had tested.

The panel was satisfied that Mr Stockton claimed he had asked Pupil A to stop messaging him on Instagram during a meeting with the School's Safeguarding Lead on 3 October 2023, in light of Mr Stockton's evidence and the corroborating meeting note. However, the panel was not satisfied that it had been proven on the balance of probabilities that this claim was untrue, as Mr Stockton's written and oral evidence provided that he had asked Pupil A to stop messaging him, and a draft of this message was provided by Mr Stockton in an email to Witness A on 21 September 2023.

The panel was satisfied that, during a meeting with the School's Safeguarding Lead on or around 3 October 2023, Mr Stockton claimed he had not met up with Pupil A and that he had ceased contact with Pupil A, as this was supported by Mr Stockton and the contemporaneous meeting note. The panel was further satisfied that both claims were untrue, as Mr Stockton stated later in the same meeting and again in a meeting on 20 October 2023, that he had in fact met up with Pupil A and had not ceased contact, which was supported by the contemporaneous meeting notes and Mr Stockton's evidence. As such, the panel was satisfied that Mr Stockton provided the School with false and misleading information regarding his contact and relationship with Pupil A.

The panel therefore found allegations 3(b)(i) and (ii) proven.

#### **4. Your conduct as may be proven at allegation 3a and/or 3b was dishonest, in that you knowingly provided false and/or misleading information**

Mr Stockton denied the allegation.

The panel considered whether Mr Stockton was dishonest by his conduct in allegation 3(a) and/or 3(b). The panel considered the case of *Ivey v Genting Casinos (UK) Ltd t/a Crockford* [2017].

In reaching a decision in respect of dishonesty, the panel needed to first ascertain, subjectively, the actual state of Mr Stockton's knowledge or belief as to the facts. Secondly, the panel needed to determine whether Mr Stockton's state of mind was honest or dishonest by the application of the objective standards of the ordinary honest person.

The panel firstly turned its mind to the actual state of Mr Stockton's knowledge or belief as to the facts.

In his oral evidence, Mr Stockton stated that he was “trying to stop the immediate fear of losing [his] career” when he provided false information to the School. Mr Stockton also confirmed in his oral evidence that he knew the School would expect him to be honest, but in the meeting on 20 September 2023 he prioritised Pupil A's request for privacy and chose to conceal certain information from the School.

The panel also considered copies of messages between Mr Stockton and Pupil A which were exhibited to Witness A's written statement, which were provided by Pupil M to the School on 19 September 2023. The panel noted that Mr Stockton stated “if [Pupil K] tells all then I'm 100% screwed”. The panel considered that this message demonstrated that Mr Stockton was aware of the potential consequences of the School gaining further information regarding his relationship with Pupil A.

The panel considered the meeting note exhibited to Witness A's written statement, in relation to a meeting that took place on 3 October 2023 between Mr Stockton, Witness A and two members of staff. Mr Stockton stated in this meeting that he "wasn't as honest as [he] should have been" because Pupil A was "keen" that he did not say anything.

The panel was satisfied that, within the meetings on 20 September 2023 and 3 October 2023, Mr Stockton deliberately sought to conceal his interactions with Pupil A from the School, as he did not want to face any possible consequences in relation to his career and he wanted to maintain Pupil A's privacy.

The panel noted that Mr Stockton stated in his oral evidence that, in the meeting on 3 October 2023, he “was in a state of professional panic”, “did not have cognitive control” to know that it was pertinent to provide full information, and described experiencing [REDACTED]. However, the panel was not provided with any [REDACTED] on Mr Stockton's ability to share information when questioned.

In weighing up the evidence as to Mr Stockton's knowledge of the facts, the panel was satisfied that Mr Stockton understood that concealing his interactions with Pupil A was dishonest. The panel noted that Mr Stockton provided information once he was presented with evidence regarding his conduct, but he deliberately chose to conceal information prior to that point.

The panel then considered the objective standards of the ordinary honest person and was further satisfied that an ordinary honest person would consider that a teacher concealing their interactions with a pupil who had recently left the School to be dishonest. The panel determined that Mr Stockton's conduct had a clear intention to prevent anyone from finding out about the relationship he had formed with Pupil A, which misled the School and was fundamentally dishonest.

The panel found Mr Stockton's conduct as proven at allegation 3(a) and 3(b) to be dishonest.

The panel therefore found allegation 4 proven.

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

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

In doing so, the panel had regard to the document 'Teacher misconduct: The prohibition of teachers', which is referred to as "the Advice".

The panel first considered whether the conduct of Mr Stockton, in relation to the facts found proved, involved breaches of the Teachers' Standards.

The panel considered that, by reference to Part 2, Mr Stockton was in breach of the following standards:

- A teacher is expected to demonstrate consistently high standards of personal and professional conduct.
- Teachers uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school, by
  - 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.

The panel also considered whether Mr Stockton'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 fraud or serious dishonesty was relevant to allegation 4. The panel found that Mr Stockton deliberately lied to the School on more than one occasion when directly asked about his interactions with Pupil A, which was serious dishonesty.

The panel went on to consider whether Mr Stockton's conduct as found proven at allegations 1 to 4 was of a serious nature, falling significantly short of the standard of behaviour expected of a teacher.

In respect of allegation 1(a), the panel considered that Mr Stockton's failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries by messaging Pupil A on social media was serious, but it did not meet the threshold of conduct falling significantly short of the standards

expected of the profession, as the panel considered that the conduct could be instead characterised as an error of judgment.

In respect of allegations 1(b) and 1(c), the panel noted that Pupil A ceased her education at the School when she met with Mr Stockton. However, the panel considered the proximity of these social interactions to Pupil A's education at the School, and the fact that Mr Stockton initially struck up a friendship with Pupil A during the [REDACTED], to be concerning. As such, the panel was satisfied that Mr Stockton's conduct in meeting up with Pupil A on separate occasions in August 2023 and September 2023 was serious and fell significantly short of the standard expected of the profession.

In relation to allegation 2, whilst the panel noted that the School's policy on relationships between a teacher and a pupil of the age of 18 and/or former pupil [REDACTED], the panel was satisfied that the School's code of conduct made clear the expectation to report low-level concerns. As such, the panel was satisfied that Mr Stockton's failure to report his relationship with Pupil A to the School prior to 19 September 2023 was conduct falling significantly short of the standards expected of a teacher.

In relation to allegations 3(a), 3(b) and 4, the panel was satisfied that Mr Stockton's conduct was very serious and fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession, as teachers are expected to be transparent and honest, whereas Mr Stockton deliberately withheld information and lied to the School regarding his interactions with Pupil A.

For these reasons, the panel was satisfied that the conduct of Mr Stockton at allegations 1(b), 1(c), 2, 3(a), 3(b) and 4 amounted to misconduct of a serious nature which fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession.

The panel noted that allegations 1(a), 1(b) and 1(c) took place outside the education setting. As such, the panel also considered whether Mr Stockton's conduct affected the way that he fulfilled his teaching role or may have led to pupils being exposed to, or influenced by the behaviour in a harmful way. The panel was not satisfied that Mr Stockton's teaching role was affected by his failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with Pupil A, who was no longer being educated at the School at the time, or that pupils may have been exposed to or influenced by his behaviour in a harmful way, as the panel did not see sufficient evidence in this regard. As such, in respect of allegations 1(a), 1(b) and 1(c) the panel was not satisfied that Mr Stockton was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct.

The panel was satisfied that Mr Stockton was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct in respect of allegations 2, 3(a), 3(b) and 4.

In relation to whether Mr Stockton'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 Mr Stockton'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 Mr Stockton was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct, the panel found that fraud or serious dishonesty was relevant in respect of allegation 4.

In respect of allegation 1(a), which occurred outside of the education setting, whilst the panel considered that Mr Stockton's messages with Pupil A after she ceased education at the School to be misguided and an error of judgement, the panel was not satisfied that the conduct would likely have a negative impact on the individual's status as a teacher.

In respect of allegations 1(b) and 1(c), which also occurred outside the education setting, the panel considered that the conduct was serious and would likely have a negative impact on the individual's status as a teacher. The panel considered that the general public would find it concerning a teacher meeting up with a former pupil who had recently left the school, on a purely social one to one basis, staying overnight together and sharing the same bed, despite the relationship being platonic.

The panel was also satisfied that Mr Stockton's conduct at allegations 2, 3(a), 3(b) and 4 could potentially damage the public's perception of a teacher. The panel considered that Mr Stockton's failure to inform the School about his interactions with Pupil A would cause the general public to be concerned about the nature of the relationship with Pupil A. Additionally, the public would be troubled by Mr Stockton's dishonesty as teachers are expected to be transparent, particularly in relation to pupils and former pupils of the School.

The panel found that Mr Stockton's actions at allegations 1(b), 1(c), 2, 3(a), 3(b) and 4 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 a 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; and
- declaring and upholding proper standards of conduct.

The panel considered that public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Mr Stockton 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 Stockton 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 Mr Stockton in the profession. The panel decided that there was a public interest consideration in retaining the teacher in the profession, since no doubt had been cast upon his abilities as an educator and he potentially is able to make a valuable contribution to the profession.

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 a high 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 Mr Stockton.

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, including the deliberate concealment of their actions; and
- collusion or concealment including lying to prevent the identification of wrongdoing.

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 no evidence that Mr Stockton's actions were not deliberate.

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

The panel saw no evidence that showed Mr Stockton was previously subject to disciplinary proceedings or warnings.

Based on the evidence available, Mr Stockton did not demonstrate exceptionally high standards in his personal and professional conduct or having contributed significantly to the education sector.

Whilst the panel found that Mr Stockton repeatedly concealed his conduct from the School during meetings on 20 September 2023 and 3 October 2023, which constituted serious dishonesty, the panel acknowledged that Mr Stockton's dishonesty ceased on 3 October 2023 when he became transparent with the School regarding his interactions with Pupil A. Additionally, the instances of dishonesty occurred within a short period of time across a few weeks. In particular, the panel noted that certain circumstances regarding their interactions, such as sharing a bed, would not have been known to the School or the panel had Mr Stockton not been honest in this regard. As such, the panel considered that, whilst the dishonesty was serious, it was not at the most serious and extreme end of the spectrum of dishonest conduct.

The panel considered that Mr Stockton demonstrated a high level of remorse and was truly apologetic for his conduct as he stated that he was "deeply sorry" for the impact of his actions on the School and the profession.

In his written statement, Mr Stockton stated that he was a "dedicated teacher with a deep love for music and education" and his conduct was "an isolated, regrettable, lapse in judgment by a junior teacher who was overwhelmed by a complex situation". The panel accepted that Mr Stockton was a teacher early in his career and he lacked full appreciation of the requirement for professional boundaries at the relevant time.

The panel also considered that Mr Stockton demonstrated insight into the wrongfulness of his actions as he admitted a number of the allegations in full or in part. Additionally, in his oral evidence, Mr Stockton stated that he "recognised" his failure to be transparent and has since worked hard to understand his professional responsibilities. Mr Stockton further stated in oral evidence that he now understood that "absolute transparency is required" and if he was to continue to teach, he would "do it with mentorship" and be

open, which are “essential”. The panel were satisfied that Mr Stockton had now appreciated that professional boundaries could extend to former pupils.

Mr Stockton stated in his written statement that he had taken several steps to learn from his conduct, as follows:

- “Professional Mentoring: I have engaged with senior professionals” “to discuss boundaries and professional distance”;
- “Safeguarding Training: I have recently completed additional, voluntary safeguarding training as part of a recent church music appointment, including two certificate levels of safeguarding training and a certificate on ‘Safer Recruitment.’ This was a deliberate choice to ensure my understanding of ‘The Keeping Children Safe in Education’ Guidelines and professional boundary requirements is current and beyond reproach”; and
- “Recognition of Role: I have learned that a teacher is a representative of the profession at all times. My informal, colloquial former self has been replaced by a rigorous professional standard of communication”.

The panel had regard to the five references provided regarding Mr Stockton’s character. The panel acknowledged that all five of the character references stated that they were prepared in the knowledge of allegations against Mr Stockton. The panel noted the following comments in particular, which suggested that Mr Stockton’s proven conduct was out of character:

Person A - [REDACTED], a teacher who has known Mr Stockton for 20 years and has worked in informal musical settings with him, stated that Mr Stockton has “demonstrated a consistent dedication to the highest standards of integrity” and based on her “extensive and long-standing observations of his character and conduct”, “the allegations seem truly uncharacteristic of the individual [she has] come to know and trust implicitly”;

Person B - [REDACTED], an individual with a professional relationship with Mr Stockton, stated that Mr Stockton “consistently maintained high standards of transparency” with him and Mr Stockton has “learnt from this experience and grown” and he does not “doubt his integrity or his desire to be a dedicated and responsible professional”;

Person C - [REDACTED], a teacher and ex-colleague of Mr Stockton, stated he “never had cause for concern regarding his communication style or his boundaries with the young people in [their] care” and Mr Stockton “never attempted to minimise his actions or hide information”;

Person D - [REDACTED], a teacher and ex-colleague of Mr Stockton, stated he was “a person of exceptional work ethic” and one of his “strongest traits” was his “transparency”.

Person E - [REDACTED], a teacher and an ex-colleague of Mr Stockton stated that she found Mr Stockton to be a “conscientious, thoughtful and professional teacher”.

The panel considered that Mr Stockton’s level of remorse and insight, passion for teaching, and multiple references regarding his character, meant there was a very low risk of Mr Stockton repeating his conduct. The panel considered that Mr Stockton could make a valuable contribution to the profession.

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, the recommendation of no prohibition order would be both a proportionate and an appropriate response. Given that the nature and severity of the behaviour were at the less serious end of the possible spectrum and, 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 considered that the publication of the adverse findings it had made was sufficient to send an appropriate message to the teacher as to the standards of behaviour that are not acceptable, and the publication would meet the public interest requirement of 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 a 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 all of the allegations proven, and that allegations 2, 3(a), 3(b) and 4 amount to unacceptable professional conduct. Additionally, the panel has found that allegations 1(b), 1(c), 2, 3(a), 3(b) and 4 constituted conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute. In respect of the proven allegations that the panel has found do not amount to unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, I have put those matters entirely from my mind.

The panel has recommended that the findings of unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute in relation to Mr Stockton should be published and that such an action is proportionate and in the public interest.

In particular, the panel has found that Mr Stockton is in breach of the following standards:

- A teacher is expected to demonstrate consistently high standards of personal and professional conduct.
- Teachers uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school, by
  - 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.

The panel finds that the conduct of Mr Stockton (in relation to allegations 1(b), 1(c), 2, 3(a), 3(b) and 4) fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession.

The findings of misconduct are serious as they include a finding of dishonesty on the part of the teacher. The panel has found that Mr Stockton *"...did not disclose, or attempt to disclose, his communication or relationship with Pupil A to the School prior to 19 September 2023, when he had become aware that there was a risk of concerns being reported to the School by others"*. This is then compounded by the finding that,

*"...within the meetings on 20 September 2023 and 3 October 2023, Mr Stockton deliberately sought to conceal his interactions with Pupil A from the School, as he did not want to face any possible consequences in relation to his career and he wanted to maintain Pupil A's privacy"*.

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 Stockton, 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 or safeguard pupils.

A prohibition order would 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,

*“The panel considered that Mr Stockton’s level of remorse and insight, passion for teaching, and multiple references regarding his character, meant there was a very low risk of Mr Stockton repeating his conduct”.*

In my judgement, the degree of insight and remorse identified by the panel means that I accept its assessment that the risk of the repetition of this behaviour is limited. 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, *“that public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Mr Stockton were not treated with the utmost seriousness when regulating the conduct of the profession”*. 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 Mr Stockton himself. The panel comment,

*“The panel had regard to the five references provided regarding Mr Stockton’s character. The panel acknowledged that all five of the character references stated that they were prepared in the knowledge of allegations against Mr Stockton. The panel noted the following comments in particular, which suggested that Mr Stockton’s proven conduct was out of character”.*

A prohibition order would prevent Mr Stockton 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.

The panel has noted that *“Mr Stockton did not demonstrate exceptionally high standards in his personal and professional conduct or having contributed significantly to the education sector”*. The panel has also found that *“There was no evidence that Mr Stockton’s actions were not deliberate”* and *“There was no evidence to suggest that Mr Stockton was acting under extreme duress, such as a physical threat or significant intimidation”*.

In this case, I have placed some weight on the panel's comments concerning the degree of insight or remorse. The panel note that Mr Stockton has taken several steps to learn from his conduct, including that he has engaged with professional mentoring, completed safeguarding training and reflected on the professional standards of a teacher.

I have also placed considerable weight on the finding that Mr Stockton was dishonest and in particular that, when asked directly about his relationship with Pupil A, he had multiple opportunities to disclose the true circumstances of the relationship, but chose not to until 3 October 2023. The panel note,

*“The panel determined that Mr Stockton’s conduct had a clear intention to prevent anyone from finding out about the relationship he had formed with Pupil A, which misled the School and was fundamentally dishonest”.*

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

In my judgment the panel has not placed sufficient weight on the dishonesty displayed by Mr Stockton, and the negative impact that such behaviour may have on the standing of, and public confidence in, the profession.

I have gone on to consider the matter of a review period. In doing so I have referred to the Advice which states the following,

*“Where a case involved any of the following, it is likely that the public interest will have greater relevance and weigh in favour of a longer period before a review is considered appropriate:*

- fraud or serious dishonesty”*

However, after considering all of the factors in this case, including the actions Mr Stockton has already taken with regards to his insight of the proven conduct, I am of the view that a two-year review period (the statutory minimum) is sufficient and appropriate to satisfy the maintenance of public confidence in the profession.

**This means that Mr Louis Stockton is prohibited from teaching indefinitely and cannot teach in any school, sixth form college, relevant youth accommodation or children’s home in England.** He may apply for the prohibition order to be set aside, but not until 29 January 2028, two years from the date of this order at the earliest. This is not an automatic right to have the prohibition order removed. If he does apply, a panel will meet to consider whether the prohibition order should be set aside. Without a successful application, Mr Stockton remains prohibited from teaching indefinitely.

This order takes effect from the date on which it is served on the teacher.

Mr Stockton has a right of appeal to the High Court within 28 days from the date he is given notice of this order.

*S. Blomfield*

**Decision maker: Stuart Blomfield**

**Date: 21 January 2026**

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