



Teaching
Regulation
Agency

Mr Zulfiqar Raja: Professional conduct panel outcome

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

February 2026

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

Teacher: Mr Zulfiqar Raja

TRA reference: 21279

Date of determination: 19 February 2026

Former employer: Lyndon School, Solihull

Introduction

A professional conduct panel (“the panel”) of the Teaching Regulation Agency (“the TRA”) convened on 15 December 2025 at Cheylesmore House, 5 Quinton Road, Coventry, CV1 2WT and 17 February 2026 by virtual means, to consider the case of Mr Zulfiqar Raja.

The panel members were Ms Aruna Sharma (teacher panellist – in the chair), Mr Philip Jolowicz (lay panellist) and Ms Olivia Cole (teacher panellist).

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

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

Mr Raja was present and was represented by Mr Nicholas Kennan, of Cornwall Street Barristers.

The legal adviser to the panel at the reconvened hearing on 17 February 2026 was Mrs Charlotte Belcher of Eversheds Sutherland (International) LLP solicitors.

The hearings took place in public and were recorded.

Allegations

The panel considered the allegations set out in the notice of proceedings dated 27 October 2025.

It was alleged that Mr Raja was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, in that while employed as a Teacher by Summit Learning Trust at Lyndon School (“the School”):

1. Mr Raja did not maintain appropriate boundaries with Pupils, in that he:
 - a) On or around 14 June 2022, provided his personal telephone number to Pupil A;
 - b) On or around 23 June 2022, provided his personal email address to Pupil B and/or Pupil C;
 - c) On or around 10 June 2022, sat close to Pupil A and/or said to them words to the effect of: “I have a gift for you” and/or “a Disney princess book for a Disney princess girl”;
 - d) On or around 15 June 2022, followed Pupil A into a pastoral office/room in circumstances in which: 1.1 He were requested not to and/or; 1.2 Pupil A was distressed by him doing so;
 - e) Between 1 January and July 2022, emailed Pupil A and/or Pupil B and/or Pupil C inappropriately, as set out in Schedule A below;
2. Between 10 -12 June 2022, Mr Raja improperly provided Pupil A with a lower tier test paper and/or test answers prior to their assessment;
3. Mr Raja’s actions at 2. above were dishonest;

Mr Raja admitted allegations 1a and 1b.

Mr Raja denied the stem of allegation 1 as well as allegations 1c, 1d, 1e, 2 and 3.

Mr Raja’s representative stated Mr Raja stated that if found proven, Mr Raja accepts that the conduct referred to at allegations 1, 2 and 3 would amount to unacceptable professional conduct and/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 and list of key people – pages 8 to 10

Section 2: Notice of proceedings and response – pages 11 to 44

Section 3: Teaching Regulation Agency witness statements – pages 45 to 51

Section 4: Teaching Regulation Agency documents – pages 52 to 427

Section 5: Teacher documents – pages 428 to 503

In addition, the panel agreed to accept the following:

Updated Witness Statement of Mr Raja dated 7 December 2025, pages 504 to 519

Certificates of completion of training for Mr Raja, pages 520 to 523

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 witnesses called by the presenting officer:

Witness A – [REDACTED]

Witness B – [REDACTED]

Witness C – [REDACTED]

Mr Raja also gave oral evidence at the hearing on 15-18 December 2025. He called the following witnesses at the mitigation stage in the reconvened hearing on 17 February 2026:

Witness D – [REDACTED], a former colleague of Mr Raja;

Witness E – [REDACTED], a former colleague of Mr Raja; and

Witness F - [REDACTED] and Teacher [REDACTED].

Decision and reasons

The panel announced its decision and reasons as follows:

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

Mr Raja was employed at the School from 4 November 2019 as a Teacher.

In June 2022, concerns were raised in respect of Mr Raja's interactions with Pupil A, Pupil B and Pupil C.

On 6 July 2022, Mr Raja was suspended and the School commenced an investigation into him.

On 6 October 2022, Mr Raja's Disciplinary Hearing took place.

On 12 October 2022, Mr Raja was dismissed from his position at the School.

On 9 November 2022, Mr Raja's appeal hearing took place.

On 21 November 2022, the School made a referral 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:

1. You did not maintain appropriate boundaries with Pupils, that you:

a) On or around 14 June 2022, provided your personal telephone number to Pupil A

The panel noted that Mr Raja admitted this allegation.

The panel also noted that it had been provided with an email dated 14 June 2022 from Mr Raja's school email address to Pupil A's school email address which read:

"Please email me if you need to talk. I am also including my number if you ever need to talk. Normally, I would never give my number to a student, but I will to you so you can contact me if you ever need my help. My number is; [redacted]."

While the number itself was redacted in the version of the email provided to the panel, the presenting officer told the panel that the unredacted version contained Mr Raja's personal telephone number. In his opening statement, Mr Raja's representative also stated that Mr Raja accepted giving his personal telephone number to Pupil A, accepting that he should not have done so.

Witness A told the panel that Mr Raja did accept that he had given his personal telephone number to Pupil A at the outset of the School's investigation

The panel therefore determined, on the balance of probabilities, that Mr Raja did give his personal telephone number to Pupil A on 14 June 2022.

The panel then turned to consider whether, in doing so, Mr Raja had failed to maintain appropriate boundaries.

The panel heard from Witness A that teachers were "absolutely not allowed" to share their personal telephone numbers with pupils. Witness A stated that teachers should not be communicating with students other than via the school's systems and that sharing personal numbers goes beyond the boundaries of acceptable behaviour.

Witness A told the panel that during the initial meeting, Mr Raja said he did not know it was inappropriate to give his personal telephone number to Pupil A.

During his oral evidence, Mr Raja told the panel that he gave his personal telephone number to Pupil A "without thinking" in the event that Pupil A needed to contact him about maths homework. Mr Raja stated that he wanted to make sure Pupil A was ok.

The presenting officer asked Mr Raja whether the use of the language in the email suggested that he knew what he was doing was inappropriate. The presenting officer cited, in particular, Mr Raja's wording that he would "normally ... never give [his] number to a student". Mr Raja stated that he did not know it was wrong at the time, and that it was not something he did. However, the panel noted that the allegation did not require consideration of whether Mr Raja knew it was wrong.

Mr Raja stated that Pupil A did not have access to Teams, the usual method used at the School to communicate with students and he referred to speaking to Pupil A's [REDACTED].

Mr Raja told the panel that Pupil A also did not have access to her School email account. However, the panel did not find this to be a plausible explanation as to why he had given Pupil A his personal telephone number, given that he was using email to communicate with Pupil A in the first place.

The panel noted that Mr Raja did not request Pupil A's telephone number. The panel also noted that Mr Raja admitted that he only gave his personal telephone number to Pupil A.

However, it found that in providing Pupil A with his personal telephone number, Mr Raja was opening the door for communication to take place outside of the School's systems and via private and informal means.

The panel found that this was an example of Mr Raja not maintaining appropriate boundaries with Pupil A, particularly in circumstances where the provision of his personal telephone number was unnecessary.

On balance, the panel found this allegation proven.

b) On or around 23 June 2022, provided your personal email address to Pupil B and/or Pupil C

The panel noted that Mr Raja admitted this allegation.

The panel also noted that it had been provided with two emails which assisted with this allegation. The first email was dated an email dated 23 June 2022 from Mr Raja's school email address to Pupil B's school email address which read:

"My email address is below if you ever need to contact me for anything and I have left Lyndon, including for a reference."

An email address was then provided with an Outlook domain.

The second email was sent on the same date by Mr Raja from his school email address to Pupil C's school email address. The email was written in the same terms as set out above. The domain name was redacted in the email address provided in the email to Pupil C. Mr Raja did not dispute that he had provided his personal email address to Pupil C. Therefore, the panel determined that, on the balance of probabilities, Mr Raja provided the same personal email address to Pupil C.

The panel heard from Witness A that teachers were "absolutely not allowed" to share their personal email addresses with pupils. Witness A stated that teachers should not be communicating with students other than via the school's systems and that sharing personal email addresses goes beyond the boundaries of acceptable behaviour.

The panel therefore determined, on the balance of probabilities, that Mr Raja did give his personal email address to Pupil B and Pupil C on 23 June 2022.

The panel then turned to consider whether, in doing so, Mr Raja did not maintain appropriate boundaries.

Mr Raja told the panel that he provided Pupil B and Pupil C with his email address because they had asked him for a reference and letter of recommendation.

The panel noted that this explanation did align with the content of the emails sent to Pupils B and C which stated “*if you ever need to contact me for anything and I have left Lyndon, including for a reference*”.

However, the panel noted the use of the words “*for anything*” and “*including for a reference*” which could suggest that Mr Raja gave Pupils B and C his email address for general ongoing contact after they had left the School, and not just for a reference.

When asked by the panel whether Mr Raja saw the wording of the emails as ambiguous, Mr Raja stated that the wording was “not the best” and was “not right”.

The panel noted that the email was worded in a way that suggested that the personal email address should be used only if Mr Raja left the School.

The panel also noted that there was no evidence in the bundle, nor did it hear from any witnesses, which suggested that Mr Raja had used his personal email address to contact Pupils B or C. Witness A also told the panel during his oral evidence that there was no evidence identified as part of his investigation to suggest that Mr Raja had used any other means of contacting Pupils B or C outside of the School’s systems.

The panel found that in providing Pupils B and C with his personal email address, Mr Raja was opening the door for communication to take place outside of the School’s systems and via private and informal means.

The panel found that this was an example of Mr Raja not maintaining appropriate boundaries with Pupils B and C, particularly in circumstances where the provision of his email address was not necessary.

On balance, the panel found this allegation proven.

c) On or around 10 June 2022, sat close to Pupil A and/or said to them words to the effect of: “I have a gift for you” and/or “a Disney princess book for a Disney princess girl”

Sat close to Pupil A

The panel noted that the TRA’s evidence in relation to allegation 1c was unclear.

The panel was provided with a limited amount of evidence in relation to Mr Raja having “sat close” to Pupil A.

It appeared to the panel that this allegation related to an incident on around 10 June 2022 during which Pupil A was with Mr Raja and they were working through a student survey.

In Mr Raja’s statement, he stated:

“The allegations made by Pupil A in relation to me sitting close to her as she completed the student survey on 10 June 2022, are completely false. I was sitting next to her, as this is how I always complete the survey with them. However, I always maintain personal space if I need to be sitting next to a student for whatever reason.”

In an email from Witness B to Mr Raja dated 24 June 2022 following a meeting between the two to discuss concerns “raised by a student”, it stated:

“You confirmed you conducted an online survey, around careers, which was 1:1 and had been for all students. You confirmed this was completed in your classroom, and you sat next to the student to complete the survey.”

The bundle also contained a record of an interview between Witness A, Mr Raja, his Union representative and a member of the School’s HR team from around August 2022. When asked about the incident on 10 June and the student survey, the note of the interview records Mr Raja’s response as follows:

“that [Mr Raja] had ‘gone to touch her’ his hand moved over her leg, but he didn’t touch her directly. [Mr Raja] refuted this strongly and was upset at the suggestion. He confirmed he sat next to her opposite but not very close – to complete the answers”.

The panel noted that the evidence available to it from Pupil A did not refer to Mr Raja sitting close to Pupil A. Pupil A’s written statement does state:

“the same day as that [he]... went to touch my leg but said not to think of it like that.”

The panel approached the evidence from Pupil A with caution as it had not heard directly from Pupil A and was not provided with an opportunity to test her evidence or see how it withstood any form of challenge.

During Witness C’s oral evidence, she told the panel that it was her recollection that Pupil A did say that Mr Raja had touched her on her leg. When asked by the teacher’s representative whether she was aware that when speaking to other people Pupil A stated that she thought Mr Raja was going to touch her on the leg, but didn’t, Witness C stated that she was not aware. During Mr Raja’s oral evidence, he maintained that the allegation in relation to the touching of Pupil A was not true.

The panel found that, on the balance of probabilities, the TRA had not provided sufficient evidence to prove that Mr Raja had sat close to Pupil A on 10 June 2022.

Words to the effect of “I have a gift for you”

The panel noted that there was an email contained in the bundle from Mr Raja to Pupil A dated 6 June 2022 which stated:

“Hopefully I will catch up with you at some point because I am starting the ‘Student Surveys’ again this week. Also, I have your gift to give you.”

Therefore, the panel found that Mr Raja did say words to the effect of “I have a gift for you” around 10 June 2022.

The panel then turned to consider whether, in doing so, Mr Raja did not maintain appropriate boundaries with Pupil A.

During his opening statement, the teacher’s representative stated that Mr Raja was merely stating a fact, that he had a gift for Pupil A.

The panel heard from Mr Raja that he would often give gifts or presents to pupils at the School. In the email from Witness B to Mr Raja dated 24 June 2022 it stated:

“you have previously given chocolate/biscuits/stationary to a number of students as a reward or if they seemed upset/down.”

Mr Raja told the panel that in his classroom, he had a drawer which was filled with gifts that he would give the pupils. In the record of interview with Mr Raja, it stated:

“[Witness A] asked if ZR gave other students gifts – ZR replied yes to incentivise them on a regular basis – he felt that some good pupils have a difficult time and is often asked by students for a mini roll if they behave etc.”

Mr Raja also confirmed in his witness statement:

“I gave school related gifts and sweets to Pupil A”.

The panel had been provided with a photograph of a Disney Princess notebook or diary which had “Dream Big” on the cover. The panel heard from Mr Raja that he gave this notebook/diary to Pupil A and that it was from the drawer in his classroom. Mr Raja also referred to another incident when he gave Pupil A a gift after she had returned to School [REDACTED].

The panel recognised that it was commonplace for teachers to give low value rewards to pupils in order to encourage engagement and participation. The panel also noted that it had not been provided with any policy from the School in relation to giving rewards, prizes or presents to students. However, the panel appreciated that it was not being asked to consider whether the giving of the gift itself was inappropriate.

The panel determined that in sending an email to Pupil A noting that he had a gift for her and without specifying any educational purpose for the gift Mr Raja did not maintain appropriate boundaries with Pupil A. The panel also noted that the message would have encouraged Pupil A to attend Mr Raja’s classroom when there was no educational purpose. The panel also noted that the email was sent at 17:52 on a Monday evening.

The panel determined that the email was unnecessary and there would have been alternative ways that Mr Raja could have notified Pupil A of any gift he had for her, for example in School the following day.

The panel therefore found that, on balance, Mr Raja did say words to the effect of “I have a gift for you” and that this was an example of Mr Raja not maintaining appropriate boundaries.

Disney princess book for a Disney princess girl

The panel noted the limited evidence provided in respect of this aspect of the allegation.

In Pupil A’s written statement dated 1 July 2022 it stated:

“he also bought me a princess book which I thought was weird he said a princess book for a princess girl.”

In the record of interview with Pupil A dated 12 July 2022 it stated:

“Mr Raja gave me a Disney Princess Book, he said it was a Disney Princess book for a Disney Princess girl”.

The panel noted the slight discrepancy between Pupil A’s accounts, i.e. referring to just a princess book rather than a Disney princess book, was irrelevant given the wording of the allegation included “words to the effect of”.

However, when asked during oral evidence, neither Witness B nor Witness C could recall being told by Pupil A that Mr Raja had said words to the effect of a Disney princess book for a Disney princess girl. Witness A also told the panel that the note in the record of interview with Pupil A merely recorded what he was told by Pupil A.

Mr Raja stated repeatedly during oral evidence that he would not have said and has never said “a Disney princess book for a Disney princess girl”.

The panel therefore noted that it was only Pupil A’s written accounts which had been provided in relation to this allegation. The panel determined that this was insufficient, particularly given that Pupil A’s evidence was hearsay.

The panel therefore found this allegation proven to the extent of Mr Raja having said words to the effect of “I have a gift for you” and that this was a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries.

On the balance of probabilities allegation 1c) had been proven.

d) On or around 15 June 2022, followed Pupil A into a pastoral office/room in circumstances in which: 1.1 You were requested not to and/or; 1.2 Pupil A was distressed by you doing so

The panel noted that while Mr Raja denied this allegation, he did admit that on 30 June (not 15 June) 2022, he did follow Pupil A into the pastoral office and then the back room of that office, but that he was never told not to go into the room, nor was Pupil A distressed by him doing so.

The panel heard that Pupil A had been involved in a [REDACTED] setup by Mr Raja for students at the School. In an email to Pupil A describing the group, Mr Raja described the group as being completely voluntary and that it was student-led. The email identified that it would involve creating posters or delivering presentations.

It was explained to the panel by Mr Raja that this incident occurred in relation to Pupil A's involvement with the [REDACTED].

In Mr Raja's witness statement he stated that he "insisted" on speaking with Pupil A in the pastoral office following Pupil A having missed a meeting on the morning of 30 June 2022.

Mr Raja stated that he "saw Pupil A at break time on 30 June 2022, and asked her why she did not attend. Pupil A became upset and said that she did not know there was a meeting..."

Mr Raja then stated that Pupil A entered the pastoral office and that he "went in to make sure she was okay." Mr Raja stated that he was told by Witness C that Pupil A "was not upset because of [Mr Raja] but she has a 'lot going on'."

Mr Raja's witness statement continues:

"I told the [REDACTED] that I would like to have a quick [word] with Pupil A and reassure her that she is not in any trouble. The [REDACTED] did not stop me from speaking with Pupil A or tell me not to do so. She did say that 'it may be best to leave it for now'. I did insist on having a quick [word] to reassure Pupil A that there was no issue with her not attending. [Witness C] did not object to me going in and seeing Pupil A just to reassure her. I told her that I would only go in for a moment and [Witness C] allowed me to do that."

Pupil A's handwritten statement dated 1 July 2022 also described the incident:

"[Mr Raja] asked to see me in the morning. I said no so he emailed my form tutor and I was told I'd get a detention if I didn't go and I still said no so at break time I was with my friend [redacted] and he saw me and was shouting my name I said sir please leave me alone I need some space he was saying no I need to talk to you. I said leave me alone

please... he kept on and followed me to [Witness C]'s office I went to sit in back room [Witness C] told him to give me space but then he came and tried to talk to me in the back room I said sir leave me alone please and he still insisted. I kept saying go away and eventually he went."

A similar account was also provided in the record of interview with Pupil A dated 12 July 2022.

The panel was therefore satisfied that Mr Raja had followed Pupil A into the pastoral office/room on around 15 June 2022.

The panel then considered whether Mr Raja had been requested not to follow Pupil A into the pastoral office/room.

Witness C stated in her witness statement:

"Pupil A shared that she needed space and I allowed her to go to the back room in Pastoral. Following Mr Raja going in to see her despite advising him not to..."

"I advised that Pupil A had asked for some space and time and that she wanted to be on her own, when [Mr Raja] asked again I advised it wasn't the right time and that she wanted to be alone. ZR then walked to the room and went in."

In Witness C's report dated 11 July 2022 the incident on 30 June 2022 is also discussed. It stated:

"Within 30 seconds, ZR came into Pastoral looking around and then said "can I go and speak to A about [REDACTED], something about wanting to tell her it was okay that she didn't come. I told ZR that A wanted to be on her own and that I wasn't even going in as she wanted space and time. ZR said "please just let me go in and check she is okay". I said ZR that I don't think it's the right time, she just wants to be alone. ZR then said he would just pop his head around the door for a minute and he walked towards the back room/door and went in."

Witness C accepted that she did not expressly tell Mr Raja not to go into the back room but she did say that even she was not going in there, and that she felt her words conveyed the message clearly.

Mr Raja told the panel that his intention, in following Pupil A into the back room, was to ensure that she did not think that she would not get a detention for not attending the [REDACTED] meeting. This was consistent with the account provided by Witness C in her written and oral evidence.

During his oral evidence, Mr Raja told the panel that when he suggested that he would go and speak to Pupil A briefly, Witness C nodded her head and said "that's fine" or something similar. The panel noted that this account was not recorded in Mr Raja's

witness statements and that Witness C was not given an opportunity to respond to this. The panel considered, on balance, that Witness C did not nod her head and/or say “that’s fine” in relation to Mr Raja’s suggestion to go into the back room to talk to Pupil A.

The panel determined that, on balance, Mr Raja was requested not to follow Pupil A into the back room, and followed her in anyway.

In doing so, the panel found that Mr Raja had not maintained appropriate boundaries. The panel noted that Mr Raja would have been aware that, by the very nature of being a pastoral office/room, pupils who entered the pastoral office/room were doing so as a result of needing space or quiet time. Mr Raja also admitted that he knew Pupil A was upset. The panel noted that Mr Raja decided to follow Pupil A into the room regardless. Given that Mr Raja did so despite being requested by Witness C not to do so, he did not maintain appropriate boundaries.

In terms of whether Pupil A was distressed by Mr Raja following her into the pastoral office/room, the panel noted that the evidence presented was limited.

Witness C explained in her written and oral evidence that when Mr Raja walked towards the back room where Pupil A was located, she followed and could see Pupil A with her hands on her head and elbows on the table. However, the panel noted that this was not sufficient to demonstrate that Pupil A was distressed by Mr Raja following her into the room.

The panel heard evidence that Pupil A appeared to have been upset before she entered the room. The panel therefore noted that Mr Raja may have exacerbated Pupil A’s emotional state by following her into the back room, but there was insufficient evidence to suggest that Pupil A was distressed by him doing so.

The panel also noted the content of the record of Mr Raja’s interview which stated:

“[Witness A] asked about [REDACTED] meetings with A. ZR stated these were held every 2 weeks – he had saw A day before and reminded her of the meeting – he sent an email to remind her – she did not attend and ZR intended to give her an update – saw her at break the day after and approached her but A flipped’ and stated she had a lot going on and she wasn’t aware of the meeting – was upset and took herself to the Pastoral Office.”

In Pupil A’s record of interview dated 12 July 2022 she also stated:

“On the 30th of June I wasn’t having a good day, at break time I went to the pastoral office and I asked [Witness C] if I could sit in the backroom.”

The panel noted that Pupil A did not refer to having been distressed as a result of Mr Raja entering the pastoral office/room.

The panel therefore determined that it had not been proven on the balance of probabilities that by following Pupil A into the pastoral office/room Pupil A was distressed.

However, the panel did find that Mr Raja had followed Pupil A into a pastoral office/room in circumstances in which he was requested not to do so and therefore did not maintain appropriate boundaries.

On balance, the panel found this allegation proven.

e) Between 1 January and July 2022, emailed Pupil A and/or Pupil B and/or Pupil C inappropriately, as set out in Schedule A below

The panel noted that it had been provided with a number of emails between Mr Raja and Pupils A, B and C within the bundle. Some of the emails had been set out in Schedule A to the allegations.

The panel noted that there were a number of examples of emails having been sent outside of school hours. The bundle contained emails timed 9, 10 and 11pm. The panel considered the timing of many of these emails to be inappropriate.

The panel heard from Witness A that it would not have been normal practice for a teacher to have been emailing a student past 6 or 7pm at night.

Witness A told the panel that it is wholly inappropriate for Mr Raja to have been communicating with a student at 11pm.

The panel also noted that Mr Raja accepted that the emails were unnecessary. Many of the emails exchanged did not have an educational purpose and the panel considered that there were often alternatives available to Mr Raja other than emailing one of the students. For example, the following email sent at 9:35pm on 4 April 2022:

“Hi [Pupil A], Can I ask you for a small favour? Will you be okay to take some [REDACTED] questionnaires to a Year 8 form tomorrow morning at form me? It's [REDACTED] form, which is in [REDACTED]. [Pupil A], you just have to take them from me at registration, and drop them to [REDACTED], she will hand them out herself. I would really appreciate it. God Bless you!”

The panel noted that Mr Raja could have sent the email to [REDACTED] or asked someone in his own form group to complete this task (given that Pupil A was not in his form). Alternatively, Mr Raja could have waited until the following morning to make the request, rather than sending it to Pupil A at 9:35pm.

The panel also noted that there were examples of Mr Raja having sent emails during school holidays the content of which was not school related. The panel found this to be inappropriate.

The panel also noted that there were examples of Mr Raja using terms such as “you’re an angel”, “my little star”, “you are such a lovely girl”. The panel considered the use of this type of language to be informal, inappropriate and unprofessional.

There were examples of Mr Raja having had conversations of a personal nature with Pupils B and C. One email to Pupil B dated 24 February 2022 timed 12:56pm stated:

“I am fine, thank you and family are well too. [REDACTED]. [Pupil B] hope you and your family are well too. Please give my regards to your [REDACTED]”

Another example to Pupil C sent on 23 May 2022 at 9:50pm stated:

“Hope you are well. [REDACTED]. Please keep us in your prayers. I will see you in form tomorrow morning. God Bless you!”

The panel noted that there was no reason for Mr Raja to share information about his family and therefore found this to be inappropriate.

The panel also considered the correspondence exchanged with Pupil C in respect of fasting. Mr Raja told the panel that Pupil C was [REDACTED]. One example was contained in an email dated 26 April 2022 sent at 8:26pm:

“Congratulations on your first fast. Well done! How was it? I hope you had a nice meal. [Pupil C] please make sure you drink alot [sic] of juice and water now. Even when I was opening my fast, I was thinking about you. I am so very proud of you.”

The panel noted that this was another example of an inappropriate email in terms of its content, for example telling a pupil that he was thinking of them, but also in respect of the timing. When asked whether he had considered whether there were any safeguarding risks involved in advising a pupil on how to fast, Mr Raja stated that he did not consider these.

The panel also considered the examples in which Mr Raja likened pupils to his own children.

In an email to Pupil B dated 11 February 2022 timed 7:35pm Mr Raja stated:

““Hope you are well. No need to thank me. Honestly, you kids are just like my own children. [Pupil B] had a difficult week to be honest, [REDACTED]. Please keep us in your prayers. Have a good weekend. God Bless you!”

Mr Raja told Pupil C on 19 May 2022 at 5:54pm:

“[Pupil C], I am so fond of you, and you are like my own child. Have a good and relaxing evening. God Bless you!”

Witness A told the panel that in likening pupils to his own children Mr Raja could have encouraged a more casual relationship between himself and the pupils. Mr Raja told the panel that he often treated pupils at the School like his own children. Mr Raja recognised that this was an inappropriate approach to take and told the panel he regrets it.

The panel noted that in likening pupils to his own children, Mr Raja ran the risk of blurring the boundaries between himself and the pupils. The panel found those emails to have been inappropriate.

The panel also noted that while there were some instances where pupils would email him first, Mr Raja often instigated a lot of the communication with Pupils A, B and C. The panel found this to be inappropriate.

The panel found the timing, content and tone of the emails to be inappropriate. In having emails of an inappropriate nature with Pupils A, B and C Mr Raja did not maintain appropriate boundaries.

On balance, the panel found this allegation proven.

2. Between 10 -12 June 2022, you improperly provided Pupil A with a lower tier test paper and/or test answers prior to their assessment

The panel noted that it had been provided with emails in which Mr Raja had provided Pupil A with a lower tier test paper and test answers prior to their assessment.

In an email dated 11 June 2022 timed 7:43pm Mr Raja attached a document entitled “Y9 Term 3 L-M”.

In an email dated 12 June 2022 timed 9:03pm Mr Raja attached a document entitled “Yr 9 – Paper Answers”.

The panel noted that Mr Raja did not dispute that these documents were the lower tier test paper and answers.

In Pupil A’s written statement dated 1 July 2022 she stated:

“He also gave me the test paper and emailed answer for Trust assessment I was sitting following day ... Late on an evening [sic] he called my mom to tell me to look at my emails as he had emailed the answers to me”.

The panel considered the investigation report prepared by Witness A dated 24 July 2022 which reported the information A had given:

“A shared that on 10/06/22 (Friday), ZR asked her if she had completed the Year 9 Trust end of year assessment. A had not done the assessment, as she had been absent from school, so he gave her the assessment.

Witness A and Mr Raja also confirmed that Pupil A was provided with the lower tier paper in advance of her sitting the assessment.

The panel therefore found that Mr Raja had provided Pupil A with a lower tier test paper and test answers prior to their assessment.

The panel then went on to consider whether in doing so Mr Raja had acted improperly.

The panel was told that Mr Raja was not Pupil A's maths teacher at the time he sent the test and answers via email. The panel considered it to be improper for Mr Raja to have sent the test as a result.

The panel heard from Witness A that there was an overlap between the design of the questions contained in the higher and lower tier test papers. While the panel noted that it had not been provided with the higher tier test paper to confirm the overlap, the panel noted that it was more likely than not that the lower tier paper would have included questions of a similar design to those included in the higher tier paper.

In Witness A's investigation report he stated:

*"I confirmed that [Pupil A] did sit the **higher tier assessment** however there were 13 questions on the higher paper that were the same in design as the lower paper, although they used different numbers e.g.*

- *Q2 in lower tier was rounding 3 significant numbers and Q1 in the higher tier was rounding 3 significant numbers*
- *Q12 in lower tier was to rewrite as ordinary numbers and Q3 in the higher tier was to rewrite as ordinary numbers*
- *Q13 in lower tier was to rewrite in standard form and Q3 in the higher tier was rewrite in standard form etc."*

Therefore, in being given access to the lower tier test paper, Pupil A would have been given an insight into the type of topics and questions she would be asked in the higher tier test paper. This would have provided Pupil A with an advantage prior to taking the assessment, even if that had not been Mr Raja's intention to do so.

The panel also noted that Mr Raja would have had other resources available to him to assist in Pupil A's preparation for the assessment.

The panel also noted that in sharing the paper and answers, that Mr Raja was undermining the Trust's / the School's assessment process.

The panel also noted that Mr Raja should have sought advice and/or permission from Pupil A's teacher and from the head of department before sending the test and answers to Pupil A. In failing doing so, Mr Raja ran the risk of Pupil A distributing the test and answers to other students who had not yet sat their assessment.

In addition, the panel considered Mr Raja's actions in sharing the test paper in the context of his relationship with Pupil A. The panel noted that this was a further example of Mr Raja having failed to maintain appropriate boundaries with Pupil A.

On balance, the panel found allegation 2 proven.

The panel found the following particulars of the allegation against you not proved, for the reasons outlined below:

3. Your actions at 2. above were dishonest

The panel noted that the TRA did not set out clearly how Mr Raja was dishonest in sharing the test paper and answers with Pupil A.

The panel considered what Mr Raja's state of knowledge or belief was as to the facts.

The panel noted that in Witness A's investigation report he stated:

"On the 01/07/22 [Mr Raja] confirmed to the Principal that he had not given A the end of year assessment, but he had gave [sic] her a practice paper."

The panel heard from Mr Raja that he considered the test to have been a past paper given that the assessment window in which the test was being sat had passed around two weeks before he sent the test to Pupil A. Mr Raja also told the panel that given the set Pupil A was in, she would not have been sitting the lower tier paper.

In Witness A's investigation report it stated:

*"[Pupil A] sat the **higher tier assessment** on Thursday 16/06/22".*

In his witness statement, Mr Raja stated:

"This paper had already been sat by the students, and it was now a past paper."

"This was a past paper and I would not have known that I should not be giving a student [this] paper out to practice on if it was not communicated by the school at any time."

The panel noted that it had not been provided with any policies or a statement from the Head of the mathematics department dealing with the information provided to staff in relation to distribution of past papers.

The panel noted that in Pupil A's witness statement she stated:

"He also gave me the test paper and emailed answer for Trust assessment I was sitting following day [sic] he told me not to tell no one and he needed it back for his student to

take the test. Late on an evening [sic] he called my mom to tell me to look at my emails as he had emailed the answers to me”.

However, the TRA did not specifically put to Mr Raja that he had asked Pupil A not to tell anyone about him sending the test and answers to her.

The panel therefore determined that Mr Raja believed that the test sent to Pupil A was a past paper. As such, in sending the test and answers to Pupil A no ordinary honest person would think him to be dishonest in sending the paper and answers to Pupil A.

On balance, the panel found this allegation not proven.

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

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

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

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

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

- Teachers uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school, by
 - treating pupils with dignity, building relationships rooted in mutual respect, and at all times observing proper boundaries appropriate to a teacher’s professional position
 - having regard for the need to safeguard pupils’ well-being, in accordance with statutory provisions
 - showing tolerance of and respect for the rights of others
- Teachers must have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach...
- Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

The panel was satisfied that the conduct of Mr Raja, in relation to the facts found proved, involved breaches of Keeping Children Safe In Education (“KCSIE”).

The panel considered that Mr Raja was in breach of the following provision:

- Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is everyone's responsibility. Everyone who comes into contact with children and their families has a role to play. In order to fulfil this responsibility effectively, all practitioners should make sure their approach is child centred. This means that they should consider, at all times, what is in the best interests of the child.

The panel also considered whether Mr Raja'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 none of these offences were relevant.

The panel noted that Mr Raja had sent inappropriate emails to Pupils A, B and C. The panel found the emails to have been inappropriate in tone, nature and content. Mr Raja also accepted that many of the emails were unnecessary given that they were not related to educational purposes. The panel also found the timing of the emails to be inappropriate. The panel determined that the emails resulted in favouritism being shown towards these three pupils and that it had encouraged a relationship which had developed beyond that of a teacher and pupil. The panel also noted that in 2022 Mr Raja was not the maths teacher for Pupils A and B nor was he their form tutor. There was therefore no legitimate reason for Mr Raja to have communicated with the pupils as frequently as he did. This was also the case for Pupil C who, while was in his form group, should not have been receiving emails of the frequency or nature as was the case.

The panel also found the use of language, referring to the pupils as "lovely" and "a star" and requesting favours from pupils to be inappropriate.

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

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

In relation to whether Mr Raja'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 Raja'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 Raja was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct, the Panel found that none of these offences were relevant.

The panel noted that the tone, nature, frequency and timing of the emails sent by Mr Raja would likely impact the way the teaching profession is viewed by others. The panel noted that even by Mr Raja's own admission, many of the emails were unnecessary.

The panel considered that Mr Raja was not behaving in a way that a role model should behave in failing to maintain appropriate boundaries and acting improperly in sharing the test and answers to Pupil A.

For these reasons, the panel found that Mr Raja's actions constituted conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

Panel's recommendation to the Secretary of State

Given the panel's findings in respect of unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, it was necessary for the panel to go on to consider whether it would be appropriate to recommend the imposition of a prohibition order by the Secretary of State.

In considering whether to recommend to the Secretary of State that a prohibition order should be made, the panel had to consider whether it would be an appropriate and proportionate measure, and whether it would be in the public interest to do so. Prohibition orders should not be given in order to be punitive, or to show that blame has been apportioned, although they are likely to have punitive effect.

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

In the light of the panel's findings against Mr Raja, which involved a failure to maintain professional boundaries including the provision of personal contact details and following a Pupil A into the pastoral room, there was a strong public interest consideration in respect of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils, given the serious findings of failing to maintain appropriate boundaries with children.

Similarly, the panel considered that public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Mr Raja, which would be concerning to a

member of the public, 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 Raja in relation to his conduct towards Pupil A, B and C, and in respect of providing the test paper to Pupil A prior to her assessment, was outside that which could reasonably be expected.

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 Raja in the profession. The panel decided that there was a public interest consideration in retaining Mr Raja in the profession, since no doubt had been cast upon his abilities as an educator and he is able to make a valuable contribution to the profession, particularly in the subject of mathematics. He also continued to make valuable contributions to the community teaching children at his [REDACTED]. The panel noted in particular it had heard and seen evidence from a number of individuals indicating that Mr Raja was a good teacher, who was passionate, willing to help and went “*above and beyond*”.

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. Whilst the behaviour was serious due to the volume of emails over a period of time, it was at the less serious end of the spectrum and Mr Raja had since taken practical steps to improve his knowledge in safeguarding. The panel considered that the nature of the communications with the pupils and behaviour was supportive in nature and the panel had not seen any evidence that there was a more sinister underlying rationale. On the evidence seen by the panel, the panel considered that Mr Raja was prioritising safeguarding children, but he was misguided in the level of support he was offering, which crossed professional boundaries. The panel considered that Mr Raja had been unable to recognise appropriate professional boundaries and that the School’s policies were not specific in this regard, for example, in relation to contacting pupils and the provision of test papers.

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 Raja.

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;

- misconduct seriously affecting the education and/or safeguarding and well-being of pupils, and particularly where there is a continuing risk;
- abuse of position or trust (particularly involving pupils);
- failure in their duty of care towards a child, including exposing a child to risk or failing to promote the safety and welfare of the children (as set out in Part 1 of KCSIE); and
- violation of the rights of pupils.

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 to suggest that Mr Raja was acting under extreme duress, for example, a physical threat or significant intimidation. The panel noted that Mr Raja's actions were deliberate in that he intended to communicate with pupils, to follow Pupil A to the pastoral room, and to provide a test paper to Pupil A (albeit he had not been dishonest in doing so). However, the panel accepted Mr Raja's evidence that, at the time, he did not know that these actions were inappropriate. From all the evidence heard by the panel, the panel was satisfied Mr Raja did not intend to cause harm by his behaviour. There was no clear evidence given to the panel that he was fully informed of his responsibilities in terms of examinations and contact with pupils, as referred to further below.

Mr Raja had a previously good record. There was a clear indication throughout the evidence before the panel that there was confidence in Mr Raja's ability as a teacher. The panel was mindful that Mr Raja had only held qualified teacher status for a short period of approximately two years prior to this incident, meaning it might be more difficult to demonstrate exceptionally high standards in his personal and professional conduct, or of having contributed significantly to the education sector. Despite the short time Mr Raja had been teaching, and that this period fell during the Covid-19 pandemic meaning that he had limited exposure to teaching in a normal school setting and the opportunity to learn from other professionals, the evidence before the panel was that Mr Raja was a reflective teacher, was performing well and would in all likelihood develop into a strong teacher in the future. He was already making effective school-wide contributions, for example, he had set up an extra-curricular [REDACTED] and supported learning through extra-curricular mathematics intervention groups.

There was no evidence that Mr Raja was previously subject to disciplinary proceedings.

Within the hearing bundle, the panel received more than 10 testimonials from individuals known to Mr Raja and the panel also heard oral evidence from Witnesses D, E and F, in addition to their written statements. Two of the witnesses who gave oral evidence to the

panel were former colleagues of Mr Raja who could attest to his commitment and abilities as a teacher.

Witness D was a former colleague of Mr Raja at the School for two academic years, but in a different department. He was aware of some of the allegations made against Mr Raja, including that a pupil had accused him of inappropriate conduct and contact by email. In his oral evidence he confirmed that Mr Raja was able to build rapport with pupils and that he really cared about his work and the pupils. He was a dedicated teacher who *“went above and beyond”* and he treated the children as though they were his own, with a holistic view of their needs. He had never seen any inappropriate conduct from Mr Raja. In his written evidence, he added: *“Zulficar is a reliable and trustworthy person who often puts others before himself. This if anything could be to his detriment; his dedication to his teaching may have at times given the perception of giving ‘too much’ although not crossing professional boundaries in my experience...Zulficar is almost kind to a fault. His honesty and care is uncommon in many ways, therefore making him appear to others unusual. This could be a characteristic that creates a perception of him being over-caring from others and possibly something others may therefore take advantage of.”*

Witness E was a former colleague of Mr Raja at the School and a mentor in the same department. He was aware of some of the allegations made against Mr Raja, including that he had followed a pupil into the pastoral room and that he had provided a test paper to a pupil before they were allowed access. Witness E, in his oral evidence, confirmed that Mr Raja was a reflective teacher and his [REDACTED] was successful. This was one of the positive things Witness E recalled Mr Raja doing. He also stated that he had *“nothing negative to say”* about Mr Raja but that Mr Raja was a *“little naïve”* in what he was trying to achieve in the profession, because he was a new teacher. This was not unusual in Witness E’s experience. Witness E’s evidence was that the mathematics department comprised an experienced team who just *“got on with it”*, and the panel inferred that this meant Mr Raja may not always have had the opportunity to learn, in detail, procedural and safeguarding matters in the department. In his written evidence, he added: *“I have nothing negative to say about Zulfiqar. He worked as a teacher of maths. He was punctual, loved working as a teacher and actually changed career very late on. He would meet all required deadlines and go that bit extra to do his job well.”*

Witness F worked with Mr Raja at his [REDACTED], where Mr Raja teaches [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] studies to children aged 7 to 16 years. He was aware of some of the allegations against Mr Raja, including that he had given his email address to a student. In his oral evidence Witness F described Mr Raja as *“passionate”* and that he *“gives 110%”*. He relayed that the children got on well with Mr Raja and he taught engaging classes, which included how to deal with social issues and encouraging children to do well at school. Witness F confirmed that Mr Raja was seen as a positive *“role model”* by the children and that he advised them on social issues such as safeguarding themselves against the dangers of drugs and gangs.

In relation to the other written testimonials received by the panel, the panel noted that they did not have the opportunity to test this evidence and see how it withstood challenge. Nevertheless, the panel noted that the character references were positive in nature, and comments from former teaching colleagues of Mr Raja included:

“Many students would comment that Zulfiqar was a teacher they could go to for advice, extra support for maths and guidance with issues that may be going on in their school life. Zulfiqar's supportive teaching style had a meaningful and positive impact on a large percentage of the student body, and during my lessons, many students would mention how highly they thought of Zulfiqar, mainly due to his humble and calm mannerisms as well as his supporting, patient and understanding nature.”

“Zulfiqar has always been professional and kind. He went over and above the teaching role offering extra lessons to the class he was teaching as well as helping out the year 11 pupils who were preparing for the GCSE exams. His personality is that of a caring and helping person who goes over and beyond what is asked and cares deeply for the pupils he comes in contact with.”

The panel noted that witnesses presented on behalf of the TRA during the hearing also confirmed Mr Raja's good character. In his oral evidence, Witness A confirmed that Mr Raja had developed good relationships with pupils and he helped them. His experience of working with Mr Raja was positive. Witness C confirmed Mr Raja was a caring teacher.

The panel considered whether there were any other mitigating factors in this case. The panel acknowledged that Mr Raja joined the school in November 2019 rather than the beginning of the academic year, which may have impacted his induction training, and that the Covid-19 pandemic later that academic year will have had an impact on his ongoing training, particularly for a new teacher. The panel considered this as a mitigating factor although Mr Raja had his own obligation under the Teaching Standards to *“have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach”*.

The School policies provided to the panel did not comprehensively cover issues such as interactions with pupils, the provision of test papers and internal assessment procedures. Witness D confirmed during his oral evidence that the School's policies were refreshed at the beginning of each year and there was a focus at the School on safeguarding and SEN awareness. Teachers were given a few weeks at the beginning of each academic year to read the new policies and sign to confirm they had done this. Witness D also confirmed that there would have been training delivered on these policies and weekly safeguarding briefings took place, although he could not recall anything more specific in relation to the training or briefings about teachers safeguarding themselves and maintenance of professional boundaries. Witness D confirmed he drew a professional boundary to avoid contacting pupils from his personal email account, which he

considered to be “*common sense*” but Witness D also believed it was communicated to him during his induction at the School.

Witness E was a mentor to Mr Raja. He confirmed he assumed that the requirements for managing professional relationships had been taught during teacher training, by his professional mentor and these requirements were clear in the Teacher Standards. Witness E could not recall whether he specifically spoke with Mr Raja in relation to this.

It was clear from Mr Raja’s oral and written evidence that he was passionate about teaching and he had reflected on the incident. The panel considered that Mr Raja had taken the criticism on board and he had made admissions, both prior to the hearing and during his oral evidence, in respect of where he felt his conduct fell short of the standards expected. He was also able to reflect further during his oral evidence, such as accepting that the perception of showing favouritism towards Pupil A, B and C was something he had not properly considered prior to the hearing. The panel noted that Mr Raja had engaged fully with the TRA process.

The panel went on to consider the level of reflection, insight and remorse shown by Mr Raja. Mr Raja accepted in his oral and written evidence that he would do things differently now and clearly set out the intentions behind his actions. Mr Raja submitted a number of written statements to the panel which included comments such as:

“The truth is that I love the teaching profession and have aspirations to progress my career further.”

“All I have asked for from the beginning, is that I am given the benefit of the doubt. I just want to be given the chance to learn from what has happened and be able to rectify the mistakes that have been made. I believe that everyone deserves a second chance and this is what I ask for. I request that you do not separate me from the profession I love and what I have worked so hard for... I am hoping for an opportunity to show the improvements I will make as a teacher based on what I have learnt during this period.”

“The fact that I had this approach of treating my students in the same way as I treat my children was an example of how naïve my thinking was in this regard. I also took on a lot of extra responsibility in terms of counselling students, without understanding its demands... I also had more contact with students outside of lesson time, as I was a [REDACTED] and was also the lead for ‘Pupil Premium’ students for the Maths department. This may have led to greater familiarity with students. Upon reflection, the above are all factors that contributed to the errors of judgement in my approach but most importantly I did not appreciate that my approach was not formal enough. I sincerely regret this and will revise my approach to ensure there are no future concerns with my approach.”

“The courses I have completed include; ‘Safeguarding Children Level 2’; and ‘Supporting teenagers and Young People’. I completed the latter course because I understand that my approach in supporting my students was not the correct one, and I became too involved in their issues...”

I also recently completed an online course that addressed ‘Safer Working Practices’. This course was essential when reviewing your own practice as someone who is responsible for young people. It enabled me to understand what ‘safer working practice’ means and how I may not have been adhering to some of the principles mentioned. I am currently in the process of designing my own course to help support and educate teachers about how they need to keep themselves and others safe in their school environment. However most importantly, I have been able to step back and review everything that has happened objectively. I have greater clarity now in what went wrong, and how I can correct my approach.”

“Moving forward, I recognise that it is imperative for the purpose of clarity that I always maintain the boundaries with students that can never be open to any adverse interpretation, which may bring my professional conduct into question. I now understand that a teacher can be kind but at the same time maintain a formal approach to his/her responsibilities as a teacher.”

“My intention was to support Pupil A; Pupil B; and Pupil C; with their academic progress and their general wellbeing. I had always acted like a parent and a mentor towards my students. My email contact and the wording of my communication clearly shows that I acted in a pastoral and parental role with these students.”

Mr Raja also submitted evidence suggesting insight into his need for further training in respect of safeguarding. This included three certificates of completion of training titled “Safeguarding Children Level 2” dated 26 March 2024; “Safer Working Practices” dated 5 October 2025; and “Supporting Teenagers and Young People” dated 29 October 2024. The panel noted that these courses were undertaken by choice by Mr Raja.

In light of the level of remorse and insight shown by Mr Raja, the panel considered the risk of repetition of this behaviour was very low. The panel did not consider that Mr Raja presented a continuing risk.

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 mindful that a prohibition order was not designed to have a punitive effect.

The panel noted that these proceedings have taken three years to conclude and the panel took this into account when considering whether prohibition would be a proportionate measure.

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 all of 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.

The panel considered a request from Mr Raja's representative for this decision to be shared with Mr Raja and his representatives simultaneously, due to personal [REDACTED] reasons. The panel agreed that this request should be accommodated.

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/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute. In this case, the panel has found allegation 3 not proven and I have therefore put that matter entirely from my mind.

The panel has made a recommendation to the Secretary of State that Mr Zulfiqar Raja should not be the subject of a prohibition order. The panel has recommended that the findings of unacceptable professional conduct and/or 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 Mr Raja in breach of the following standards:

- Teachers uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school, by
 - treating pupils with dignity, building relationships rooted in mutual respect, and at all times observing proper boundaries appropriate to a teacher's professional position
 - having regard for the need to safeguard pupils' well-being, in accordance with statutory provisions

- showing tolerance of and respect for the rights of others
- Teachers must have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach...
- Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

The panel was satisfied that the conduct of Mr Raja involved breaches of the responsibilities and duties set out in statutory guidance Keeping children safe in education (KCSIE).

The panel finds that the conduct of Mr Raja 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 Mr Raja, and the impact that will have on the teacher, is proportionate and in the public interest.

In this case, I have considered the extent to which a prohibition order would protect children and safeguard pupils. The panel has observed:

“In the light of the panel’s findings against Mr Raja, which involved a failure to maintain professional boundaries including the provision of personal contact details and following a Pupil A into the pastoral room, there was a strong public interest consideration in respect of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils, given the serious findings of failing to maintain appropriate boundaries with children.”

A prohibition order would therefore prevent such a risk from being present in the future.

I have also taken into account the panel’s comments on insight and remorse, including:

“Mr Raja also submitted evidence suggesting insight into his need for further training in respect of safeguarding. This included three certificates of completion of training titled “Safeguarding Children Level 2” dated 26 March 2024; “Safer Working Practices” dated 5 October 2025; and “Supporting Teenagers and Young

People” dated 29 October 2024. The panel noted that these courses were undertaken by choice by Mr Raja.

In light of the level of remorse and insight shown by Mr Raja, the panel considered the risk of repetition of this behaviour was very low. The panel did not consider that Mr Raja presented a continuing risk.”

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:

“Similarly, the panel considered that public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Mr Raja, which would be concerning to a member of the public, were not treated with the utmost seriousness when regulating the conduct of the profession.”

I am particularly mindful of the finding of frequently sending inappropriate emails to pupils 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 Raja himself. The panel has commented:

“Mr Raja had a previously good record. There was a clear indication throughout the evidence before the panel that there was confidence in Mr Raja’s ability as a teacher. The panel was mindful that Mr Raja had only held qualified teacher status for a short period of approximately two years prior to this incident, meaning it might be more difficult to demonstrate exceptionally high standards in his personal and professional conduct, or of having contributed significantly to the education sector. Despite the short time Mr Raja had been teaching, and that this period fell during the Covid-19 pandemic meaning that he had limited exposure to teaching in a normal school setting and the opportunity to learn from other professionals, the evidence before the panel was that Mr Raja was a reflective teacher, was performing well and would in all likelihood develop into a strong teacher in the

future. He was already making effective school-wide contributions, for example, he had set up an extra-curricular [REDACTED] and supported learning through extra-curricular mathematics intervention groups.”

The panel has noted that it received more than 10 testimonials from individuals known to Mr Raja and that at the hearing it heard from 2 former colleagues of Mr Raja who attested to his commitment and abilities as a teacher.

A prohibition order would prevent Mr Raja 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 found that there was no evidence to suggest that Mr Raja was acting under extreme duress and that his actions were not deliberate. However, I have noted the panel’s comment that:

“However, the panel accepted Mr Raja’s evidence that, at the time, he did not know that these actions were inappropriate. From all the evidence heard by the panel, the panel was satisfied Mr Raja did not intend to cause harm by his behaviour. There was no clear evidence given to the panel that he was fully informed of his responsibilities in terms of examinations and contact with pupils, as referred to further below.”

In this case, I have placed considerable weight on the panel’s comments concerning the insight and remorse shown by Mr Raja and other mitigating factors including:

“It was clear from Mr Raja’s oral and written evidence that he was passionate about teaching and he had reflected on the incident. The panel considered that Mr Raja had taken the criticism on board and he had made admissions, both prior to the hearing and during his oral evidence, in respect of where he felt his conduct fell short of the standards expected. He was also able to reflect further during his oral evidence, such as accepting that the perception of showing favouritism towards Pupil A, B and C was something he had not properly considered prior to the hearing. The panel noted that Mr Raja had engaged fully with the TRA process.”

I have given particular weight to the panel’s findings that Mr Raja had taken practical steps to improve his knowledge of safeguarding and that it did not consider that Mr Raja presented a continuing risk.

I have also placed considerable weight on the finding of the panel that the nature and severity of Mr Raja’s behaviour were at the less serious end of the possible spectrum.

For these reasons, I have 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', written in a cursive style.

Decision maker: David Oatley

Date: 25 February 2025

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