



Teaching
Regulation
Agency

Mr Stephen White: Professional conduct panel outcome

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

March 2026

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

Teacher:	Mr Stephen White
Teacher ref number:	3746825
Teacher date of birth:	16 February 1992
TRA reference:	21947
Date of determination:	24 March 2026
Former employer:	St Wilfrid's Catholic School, Crawley.

Introduction

A professional conduct panel ("the panel") of the Teaching Regulation Agency ("the TRA") convened on 16 to 24 March 2026 by way of a virtual hearing, to consider the case of Mr Stephen White.

The panel members were Mr Ian Hylan (teacher panellist – in the chair), Ms Stephanie Hayle (lay panellist) and Mr Philip Jolowicz (lay panellist).

The legal adviser to the panel was Mr Jonathan White of Blake Morgan LLP solicitors.

The presenting officer for the TRA was Mr Michael Bellis of Capsticks LLP solicitors.

Mr Stephen White was present and was represented by a lay representative, Ms Alia Torreadrado.

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

Allegations

The panel considered the allegations set out in the notice of proceedings dated 18 December 2025.

It was alleged that Mr Stephen White was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute in that: while employed as a teacher at St Wilfrid's Catholic School in Crawley ("the School"):

1. Between around March 2020 and March 2023, he engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil A in that he:

- a. Sent one or more emails to Pupil A of a personal nature;
- b. Provided Pupil A with his personal mobile phone number;
- c. Exchanged text messages with Pupil A of a personal nature;
- d. Spent time alone with Pupil A on School premises;
- e. Sent a letter to Pupil when there was no professional reason to do so;
- f. Took photographs with Pupil A on his mobile phone;
- g. Called Pupil A "a very special person";
- h. Referred to Pupil A as '#1';
- i. Sent photographs to Pupil A of his baby;
- j. Provided gifts to Pupil A.

2. Between around March 2020 and March 2023, he did not inform the School of his contact and/or communication with Pupil A;

3. Between around November 2021 and March 2023, he failed to follow one or more management advice and/or warnings from members of staff at the School to limit his contact and/or communication with Pupil A;

4. His conduct as set out in paragraphs 1, 2, and/or 3 was a failure to maintain proper professional boundaries;

5. His conduct as set out in paragraphs 2 was dishonest and/or lacked integrity.

Mr White admitted allegations and admitted that he was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct. He did not admit that his conduct 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 5 to 7

Section 2: Notice of proceedings and response – pages 8 to 25

Section 3: Teaching Regulation Agency witness statements – pages 26 to 184

Section 4: Teaching Regulation Agency documents – pages 185 to 195

Section 5: Teacher documents – pages 196 to 235

In addition, the panel agreed to accept the following:

Bundle of documents containing cards sent by pupils at the School to Mr White.

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]

Witness D - [REDACTED]

Witness E - [REDACTED]

Pupil B.

Pupil C.

Mr White 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.

The panel took advice from the legal advisor.

Mr White had been employed by the School as a teacher of Religious Education (“RE”) between 1 September 2017 and 20 March 2023, initially as an unqualified teacher and subsequently as a qualified teacher following his qualification. Mr White had previously been employed by the School as a teaching assistant and cover supervisor between September 2013 and July 2016. Mr White had also been a pupil at the School.

On 11 January 2023 a former pupil reported to the School that Mr White had been communicating with Pupil A by text message. The School reported the matter to the LADO on 12 January 2023. The School commenced an internal investigation on 19 January 2023, the same day on which Mr White was suspended. On 20 March 2023 Mr White was dismissed. The matter was referred to the TRA on 10 May 2023.

The allegations concerned Mr White’s interactions with Pupil A during her time at the school. Pupil A had been in Mr White’s RE class [REDACTED]. She remained at the School for sixth form, though not in his class. Pupil A left the School in [REDACTED], having completed Year 13.

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. Between around March 2020 and March 2023, you engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil A in that you:

a. Sent one or more emails to Pupil A of a personal nature;

Mr White admitted this particular and the panel was satisfied that this admission was consistent with the evidence and was therefore properly made. The panel was presented with copies of emails sent by Mr White from his school email account to Pupil A’s school email account. These emails began in March 2020 and continued until 2022 when, on Mr White’s evidence, contact with Pupil A mainly moved onto text messaging. The panel reviewed the emails and noted that as well as matters relating to school, they contained topics that did not relate to school. The panel further noted that the nature of the messages was personal in tone, volume and content. By way of example, the panel was

presented with an email sent by Mr White to Pupil A in May 2021 at 6.16pm which included the following:

“Hey Hey Hey #1. Just wanted to say a massive thank you for my card and gifts...”

“Thank you for being a good friend to me, also! I will miss you tremendously, you have no idea!”

The email was signed off “Mr. Stephen x”

A number of the emails were sent outside school hours, often after 9pm, and on weekends. The panel was satisfied on the balance of probabilities that Mr White had sent Pupil A emails of a personal nature.

b. Provided Pupil A with your personal mobile phone number;

Mr White admitted this particular and the panel was satisfied that this admission was consistent with the evidence and was therefore properly made. Mr White admitted that he had exchanged text messages with Pupil A, something he could not have done unless she had his mobile phone number. The panel was satisfied on the balance of probabilities that Mr White had provided Pupil A with his mobile phone number.

c. Exchanged text messages with Pupil A of a personal nature;

Mr White admitted this particular and the panel was satisfied that this admission was consistent with the evidence and was therefore properly made. The panel was presented with evidence of notes made by the investigation officer, including of her meeting with Pupil A. During that meeting, the investigation officer recorded, Pupil A told her that “they [her and Mr White] decided to text as they felt that they were being watched by others and that they can no longer email each other because they were aware that this could be monitored.” Pupil A showed the investigation officer the text messages. The investigation officer noted that there were “upwards of 100 text message exchanges from the previous evening alone”. The topics discussed in those messages included “football, University and a book that [Pupil A] was reading”. The panel was satisfied on the balance of probabilities that the text messages exchanged between Mr White and Pupil A were of a personal nature, having regard to their volume, tone and content.

d. Spent time alone with Pupil A on School premises;

Mr White admitted this particular and the panel was satisfied that this admission was consistent with the evidence and was therefore properly made. The panel was presented with evidence from the Deputy Headteacher in which he stated that in January 2023 he had encountered Mr White and Pupil A alone together in the chapel. A member of staff had also reported to the Headteacher that Mr White and Pupil A had been alone together in the RE department office at 7.15am and that it was not the first time that they had been

seen alone together in that office. The panel was satisfied on the balance of probabilities that Mr White had spent time alone with Pupil A on School premises.

e. Sent a letter to Pupil A when there was no professional reason to do so;

Mr White admitted this particular and the panel was satisfied that this admission was consistent with the evidence and was therefore properly made. The panel was presented with evidence from Pupil C who stated that Pupil A had told her about the letter and seen her with it. Pupil C explained that although she had not been able to read the letter, Pupil A had read part of it to her. That part of the letter had dealt with personal issues relating to Pupil A. Pupil C had noted that the letter was “two to three double sides” of writing.

The investigation officer told the panel that she could think of no reason for a teacher to write a letter to a pupil, given the existence of school emails. The panel was satisfied on the balance of probabilities that Mr White sent a letter to Pupil A and that there was no professional reason for him to have done so.

g. Called Pupil A “a very special person”;

Mr White admitted this particular and the panel was satisfied that this admission was consistent with the evidence and was therefore properly made. The panel was presented with an email from Pupil A to Mr White in which she said “As you said to me and will say to you – ‘you are a very special person’”. The panel was satisfied on the balance of probabilities that Mr White had told Pupil A that she was “a very special person”.

h. Referred to Pupil A as ‘#1’;

Mr White admitted this particular and the panel was satisfied that this admission was consistent with the evidence and was therefore properly made. The panel noted, by way of an example, the email sent by Mr White to Pupil A in 2021 referred to above, which began “Hey Hey Hey #1”. The panel was satisfied on the balance of probabilities that Mr White had referred to Pupil A as “#1”.

i. Sent photographs to Pupil A of your baby;

Mr White admitted this particular and the panel was satisfied that this admission was consistent with the evidence and was therefore properly made. The panel was presented with evidence of the email in which Mr White had attached a photograph of his newborn child. The panel was satisfied on the balance of probabilities that Mr White had sent this photograph to Pupil A. The panel noted only one instance of this occurring and so its finding was in connection to the single photograph.

j. Provided gifts to Pupil A.

Mr White admitted this particular and the panel was satisfied that this admission was consistent with the evidence and was therefore properly made. Mr White told the panel

that on an occasion he had bought Pupil A a book of mindfulness quotes for her birthday. Mr White had accepted that he had not bought birthday gifts for the whole class. He had also given her a drink and a bar of chocolate before an exam. The panel was satisfied on the balance of probabilities that Mr White had provided gifts to Pupil A that were over and above gifts provided to the whole class, for example.

The panel considered whether the matters found proved at 1a-e and 1g-j amounted to an inappropriate relationship with Pupil A. Mr White admitted that it did, and the panel was satisfied that this admission was consistent with the evidence and was therefore properly made.

The panel found that the emails and text messages alone would have been sufficient to establish that this was an inappropriate relationship between a teacher and a pupil. The content, times and the frequency of the communication and the fact that it continued over a period of three years were significant factors in reaching this conclusion. The panel found that a teacher messaging a pupil out of school hours and at weekends was entirely inappropriate. By acting as he had done, Mr White had created a safeguarding risk to Pupil A.

The panel had been presented with an email exchange in 2022 sent at 4.51pm, which crystallised the inappropriateness of the relationship. In that exchange, Mr White had written the following email to Pupil A:

“Hi,

I know its really bad timing and I’m sorry for mentioning it but as I said, I thought you’d rather hear it from me first than someone else (hopefully I’m not wrong). Plus, I also felt bad being colder/blunter at the mo with everything going on and wanted you to know why Please don’t mention it to anyone else yet until someone has spoken to you as I will get into a lot of trouble with that as I was told not to say anything – I know you probably want to rant! As I said everything will be fine but it is very annoying and very upsetting ([REDACTED]) but it’ll get better, I will explain more about this soon. I’m sorry! (also don’t swear in reply as that might flag up).”

This email was a reference to Mr White having been advised by senior staff at the School to be careful about the amount of contact he had with Pupil A.

Pupil A replied as follows:

“Yeah, thanks for letting me know I’m just in complete shook [sic] and well don’t need the added stress but yeah not much I can say. I’m really sorry aswell [sic] I don’t want anything bad to happen to you and I’m sorry this has put a strain on you!”

It was around this time that communication moved away from emails and on to text messaging.

The panel was satisfied on the balance of probabilities that Mr White had engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil A through the period between March 2020 and March 2023.

2. Between around March 2020 and March 2023, you did not inform the School of your contact and/or communication with Pupil A;

Mr White admitted this allegation and the panel was satisfied that this admission was consistent with the evidence and was therefore properly made.

The panel was presented with the School's code of conduct, which stated at paragraph 3.2c that teachers and support staff should "report any incident which may be perceived to breach the established boundaries between registered teachers and students".

In his evidence to the panel, the [REDACTED] gave the example that if a teacher accidentally included an 'x' in an email to a pupil on a single occasion, this should still be reported to the School.

The panel had found in relation to Allegation 1 that Mr White engaged in extensive communications with Pupil A including emails, text messages, a letter and one to one contact on School premises over a period of three years. Mr White did not notify the School of this and, when first asked about it, initially denied it. The panel was satisfied on the balance of probabilities that Mr White had been under a duty to inform the School of his contact and communication with Pupil A and had failed to do so.

3. Between around November 2021 and March 2023, you failed to follow one or more management advice and/or warnings from members of staff at the School to limit you contact and/or communication with Pupil A;

Mr White admitted this allegation and the panel was satisfied that this admission was consistent with the evidence and was therefore properly made.

The panel was presented with evidence from the [REDACTED]. He had become aware of concerns about Mr White and his closeness to Pupil A in November 2021.

[REDACTED] had advised the Head of the RE department to speak to Mr White so that he would be aware of the situation and take the appropriate steps. In December 2021 [REDACTED] had spoken to Mr White personally, as the situation had not improved. [REDACTED] told the panel that he had made clear to Mr White that he needed to take demonstrable steps to ensure that he maintained a professional distance with Pupil A. [REDACTED] was satisfied at the time that Mr White had understood the advice, which had been delivered clearly and was related to the School's code of conduct.

[REDACTED] was later informed that Mr White had not taken the advice seriously and had dismissed the concerns. Mr White told the panel that at the time he had not considered the concerns to be fair.

[REDACTED] had a further conversation with Mr White in May 2022. On that occasion he advised Mr White that “unless he changed how he interacted with Pupil A it was going to be damaging for his career and Pupil A’s reputation and development”. The panel was presented with evidence that following this second meeting with [REDACTED], the seating arrangements in the RE office were changed so as to reduce the opportunity for Pupil A to sit next to Mr White. Mr White had also been advised not to be alone with Pupil A.

[REDACTED] had suggested, through her cross-examination, that the meetings between Mr White and [REDACTED] were informal. The panel was of the view that there did not need to be a significant level of formality for the advice being given to Mr White to have been fully understood. He had received advice on at least three occasions, in all cases from a member of staff in a senior position to him, including on two occasions, by [REDACTED].

The panel was therefore satisfied on the balance of probabilities that Mr White had received advice and/or warnings to limit his contact with Pupil A, including not placing himself in a one to one situation with Pupil A. He was therefore under a duty to follow that advice and to change his conduct accordingly. As noted in the panel’s findings in relation to Allegation 1, Mr White failed to follow this advice/warnings and continued to maintain an inappropriate relationship with Pupil A. The relationship became more inappropriate after the second meeting with [REDACTED] as the contact moved away from the school email system and on to text messaging. Mr White was found alone with Pupil A in the chapel in January 2023, shortly before his suspension.

The panel was satisfied on the balance of probabilities Allegation 3 was proved.

4. Your conduct as set out in paragraphs 1, 2, and/or 3 was a failure to maintain proper professional boundaries;

Mr White admitted this allegation and the panel was satisfied that this admission was consistent with the evidence and was therefore properly made.

The panel was presented with evidence of the School’s code of conduct, which stated at paragraph 3.1:

“Teachers and Support Staff base their relationship with students on trust and respect; they:

3.1b “conduct their relationships with students professionally and appropriately both in school and out of school...”

3.1d “ensure that any communication with students is appropriate including communications via electronic means such as e-mail, texting and social networking websites; for example it is inappropriate for staff to have students as ‘friends’ on social network sites or for students to have teachers phone numbers. Please also be aware of the use of personal language which could bring the school into disrepute”

The panel was satisfied on the balance of probabilities that Mr White was under an obligation, both as a teacher generally and a teacher at the School, to maintain proper professional boundaries.

The panel was further satisfied on the balance of probabilities that Mr White’s conduct as found proved in relation to Allegations 1, 2 and 3 represented a failure to maintain those boundaries. It was fundamentally incompatible with maintaining professional boundaries to engage in an inappropriate relationship with a pupil, as Mr White had done. Mr White’s failure to inform the school about his contact and communication with Pupil A took place in the context of the inappropriate relationship, and his failure to follow the advice and warnings given to him by the School meant that the inappropriate relationship continued and escalated. The panel was satisfied on the balance of probabilities that Mr White had failed to maintain proper professional boundaries and found Allegation 4 proved.

5. Your conduct as set out in paragraphs 2 was dishonest and/or lacked integrity.

Mr White admitted this allegation and the panel was satisfied that this admission was consistent with the evidence and was therefore properly made.

The panel considered the allegation of dishonesty and in doing so, assessed Mr White’s state of knowledge and belief during the period between March 2020 and March 2023. In his evidence, Mr White accepted that he knew the following at the time:

- That a number of his colleagues at the School were concerned about the nature of his relationship with Pupil A;
- That by the time he was involved in text message exchanges with Pupil A, that he should have told someone at the School. Mr White told the panel that while he knew at the time that he ought to have told someone, he did not consider it with specific reference to the code of conduct;
- That instead of informing the School, he took steps to conceal matters from the School;
- That he knew what he was doing was wrong, which was reflected in his initial denial of matters to the School, even though he corrected the position soon afterwards.

The panel was satisfied on the balance of probabilities that Mr White’s conduct in not informing the School of the contact/communication with Pupil A would be considered dishonest by the standards of ordinary decent people. The panel had particular regard to

the efforts to conceal matters in reaching this conclusion. In the email from Mr White in 2022 quoted in Allegation 1, the following sections were particularly relevant:

“Please don’t mention it to anyone else yet until someone has spoken to you as I will get into a lot of trouble...”

“don’t swear in reply as that might flag up”

The panel was also presented with an email in which Mr White wrote to Pupil A:

“No problemo! Just remember – keep on down low”.

The panel considered that Mr White was taking deliberate steps to ensure that the School did not find out about his communications with Pupil A. The reference to Pupil A not swearing appeared to be an attempt to ensure that the email did not get flagged by the School’s IT systems. The request that Pupil A not tell anyone and that she keep it on the “down low” were clearly intended to conceal matters from the School.

The panel found that ordinary decent people would have expected Mr White to be fully transparent about the nature of his communications with Pupil A and to have told the School about them. Instead, Mr White had taken steps to conceal his communications from the School. When confronted with the truth of matters, his initial instinct was to be untruthful.

The panel found on the balance of probabilities that Mr White’s conduct was dishonest throughout the period of the inappropriate relationship.

In relation to integrity, the panel was satisfied on the balance of probabilities that Mr White had lacked integrity by not informing the School of his communications with Pupil A. Mr White’s conduct fell far below the ethical standards of the teaching profession, particularly by his efforts to conceal matters.

The panel found the following particulars of the allegations against you not proved, for these reasons:

1 f. Took photographs with Pupil A on your mobile phone;

The panel was presented with a group photograph, which included Person A, and two photographs of Pupil A and Mr White, with nobody else in the photograph. The panel heard that the taking of a group photograph at the end of term, for example, was not unusual. In relation to the photographs with Pupil A and Mr White, the evidence indicated that this was not taken on Mr White’s phone. The panel noted an email from Pupil A to Mr White attaching those photographs in which she said “I’m not sure if you actually want these but these are the pictures we took earlier”. The panel concluded that Pupil A had sent Mr White these photographs, not the other way round.

The panel was presented with an email from Pupil A asking Mr White to send her the “pictures we took on your phone”. It was unclear to the panel what was in those pictures and so the panel was unable to conclude that Pupil A was in them nor that she was the subject.

The panel was not satisfied on the balance of probabilities that the photographs of the group were inappropriate in all the circumstances, and it was not satisfied that Mr White had taken the photograph of himself and Pupil A on his mobile phone. This element of Allegation 1 was therefore not proved.

Findings as to unacceptable professional conduct and 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 White, in relation to the facts found proved, involved breaches of the Teachers’ Standards.

The panel considered that, by reference to Part 2, Mr White was in breach of the following elements of the 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
- 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 found that Mr White had breached these elements of the Teachers Standards by his repeated and continuing failure to observe proper boundaries over a period of three years. Mr White’s breaches presented a significant safeguarding risk that could have had a serious impact on Pupil A’s well-being.

In his evidence, Mr White had explained that he had believed at the time that there was a “righteousness” about his conduct. This was based on what he considered to be the ethos of the School, having regard to its approach to pastoral care and faith. The panel considered Mr White’s evidence carefully, as it did with the evidence provided by the witnesses from the School, all of whom were in leadership roles. The panel considered that Mr White had fundamentally misunderstood the ethos of the School, as well as demonstrating a lack of proper regard for the policies and practices in place at the time.

The panel was satisfied that the conduct of Mr White, in relation to the facts found proved, involved breaches of Keeping Children Safe In Education 2021 (“KCSIE”). Mr White had stated in his evidence that he had concerns for Pupil A’s welfare and that this explained the context of his actions in maintaining his relationship with her.

The panel considered that Mr White was in breach of the following provisions:

“9. Any staff member who has any concerns about a child’s welfare should follow the processes set out in paragraphs 55-70. Staff should expect to support social workers and other agencies following any referral”.

“56. If staff have any concerns about a child’s welfare, they should act on them immediately.”

Mr White told the panel that he had tried to raise concerns, but there was no evidence that he had raised these in a formal manner and such concerns as he had raised had largely been reactive to him being advised to limit his own contact with Pupil A. The panel noted that Mr White’s own conduct was within the category of low level concerns identified at paragraph 410 of KCSIE, which included being over-friendly with children and having favourites.

The panel also considered whether Mr White’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 White’s conduct took place both inside and outside the education setting, having regard to the fact that a significant amount of the communication by email and text took place out of school hours and/or on non-school days. In both instances, Mr White’s conduct affected the way he fulfilled his teaching role as it may have led to Pupil A being exposed to the behaviour in a harmful way, having regard to the safeguarding failures that Mr White’s conduct represented. The panel was presented with evidence from Pupil B that Pupil A had been mocked by other pupils

about her relationship with Mr White. Pupil C's evidence was that the relationship remained the subject of gossip throughout the School after Mr White left.

For these reasons, the panel was satisfied that the conduct of Mr White 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 White was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct.

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

The findings of misconduct were serious, and the conduct displayed would be likely to have a negative impact on the individual's status as a teacher. The panel considered that Mr White's conduct could potentially damage the public's perception of a teacher. In his evidence, Mr White had told the panel that parents of pupils had been supportive of him in relation to these matters.

The panel noted, however, that it was a member of the public, who was also a former student, who brought the full extent of Mr White's conduct to the School's attention. The witnesses from the School who had given evidence had all been clear that they considered Mr White's conduct was inappropriate. Pupil B and C had considered the conduct to be wrong. As noted above, the fact of the relationship between Mr White and Pupil A was the subject of widespread gossip in the School amongst staff and pupils and this had included Pupil A being mocked.

For these reasons, the panel found that Mr White'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/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
- declaring and upholding proper standards of conduct.

In the light of the panel's findings against Mr White, there was a strong public interest consideration in respect of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils, given the serious findings that Mr White was involved in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil A over a period of three years and dishonest concealment of the relationship from the School.

Similarly, the panel considered that public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Mr White 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 White 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 White in the profession. Whilst there was evidence from the School, and from Mr White's character references, that Mr White had ability as an educator, the panel considered that the adverse public interest considerations above outweighed any interest in retaining Mr White in the profession, since his behaviour fundamentally breached the standard of conduct expected of a teacher.

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. The

panel had found that Mr White's actions were entirely inappropriate and had created a significant safeguarding risk to Pupil A. In doing so, he had acted in a way that was fundamentally incompatible with maintaining professional boundaries.

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 White.

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);
- dishonesty or a lack of integrity, including the deliberate concealment of their actions or purposeful destruction of evidence, especially where these behaviours have been repeated or had serious consequences, or involved the coercion of another person to act in a way contrary to their own interests;
- collusion or concealment including:
 - encouraging others to break rules;
 - lying to prevent the identification of wrongdoing;

In relation to "misconduct seriously affecting the education and/or safeguarding and well-being of pupils, and particularly where there is a continuing risk", the panel concluded that this was engaged at a low level. There was limited evidence of harm caused to Pupil A, though the panel did note that she had experienced a degree of stress as a result of the relationship as evidenced in the email exchange referred to in Allegation 1. Pupil A had also been the subject of mockery in the School on account of her relationship with Mr White. Those matters aside, it was the risk of harm rather than actual harm that was engaged. For the reasons set out below, the panel concluded that there was little continuing risk posed by Mr White, on account of his insight and reflections.

In relation to "abuse of position or trust", the panel found that this was engaged only to the extent that Mr White had taken the relationship off School emails and thus concealed the relationship from the School.

The panel considered whether Mr White demonstrated deep-seated attitudes that led to harmful behaviour. The panel concluded that Mr White had, by his own admission, been arrogant in not taking the concerns raised by the School seriously. Mr White's attitude had been that he knew best and had judged his conduct according to his own motives rather than by the standards of the School. However, the panel accepted that Mr White had been well-intentioned, if naïve, and therefore this did not fall into the category of a deep-seated attitude. This behaviour was therefore not engaged.

The panel noted that Mr White's conduct fell within the definition of online behaviours, as defined at paragraph 41 of the Advice. However, the panel carefully considered the online behaviours as evidenced and considered that these did not increase the seriousness over and above what had already been identified.

Even though some of the behaviour found proved in this case indicated that a prohibition order could 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.

In the light of the panel's findings, there was no evidence that Mr White's actions were not deliberate. There was no evidence to suggest that Mr White was acting under extreme duress. Mr White had not demonstrated evidence of exceptionally high standards in his personal and professional conduct or of having contributed significantly to the education sector.

The panel accepted that the conduct was out of character. The panel was referred to four character witness statements as well as the bundle of cards from former pupils that had been admitted on the first day of the hearing. Mr White's [REDACTED] wrote:

"My impression, therefore, in [REDACTED] that involved children and young people that Stephen's behaviour was both impeccable and exemplary".

"In my opinion, given my experience with Stephen, having known him for thirteen years, that he has learnt much about boundaries from this experience and I hope the panel will recommend that he retains his ability to teach".

One of Mr White's former colleagues, who worked with him at the School [REDACTED] wrote:

"Throughout my time working alongside Stephen he always worked with authenticity and integrity. He would always consider the needs of every individual in front of him, and went out of his way to think of bespoke methods to teach and nurture students. He was passionate about the holistic development of students, and often championed student involvement in extra-curricular activities related to social justice issues. Stephen was reflective on his own practice, would always want to improve for the benefit of the

students. Stephen always cared deeply for students and would always go the extra mile to support them”.

The panel assessed Mr White’s insight and remorse, having heard detailed evidence from him. The panel found that Mr White had demonstrated significant insight. Mr White had explained in his evidence the various ways in which he now understood that Pupil A could have been negatively impacted by his conduct. Mr White also demonstrated a clear understanding of the impact on the School and on his colleagues. Mr White had explained how events in his own life had informed his approach to the situation with Pupil A, an approach he had accepted was inappropriate and wrong. The panel found Mr White’s insight on that link to be significant and positive.

The panel considered that Mr White now recognised and had a full understanding of the reasons why he had, wrongly, not followed the advice given to him by the School concerning his relationship with Pupil A. Mr White had explained that there were trust issues between himself and the School and he had been concerned that the School had formed the wrong conclusions about the basis of the relationship. The panel considered that Mr White now understood that his actions had been wrong and it noted that Mr White took full responsibility for those decisions and was genuinely remorseful for them.

Taking all of those matters into account, the panel concluded that there was a low risk of repetition as there was a full understanding on Mr White’s part about why he had conducted himself as he had.

The panel weighed the public interest factors and the behaviors set out above alongside Mr White’s significant insight and genuine remorse.

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 sanction.

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

In this case, the panel has found some of the allegations proven and found that those proven facts amount to unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute. The panel has found one of the allegations not proven. I have therefore put those matters entirely from my mind.

The panel has made a recommendation to the Secretary of State that the findings of unacceptable professional conduct and conduct likely to bring the profession into disrepute, in relation to Mr Stephen White, should be published and that such an action is proportionate and in the public interest.

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

- Teachers uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school, by
 - treating pupils with dignity, building relationships rooted in mutual respect, and at all times observing proper boundaries appropriate to a teacher's professional position
 - having regard for the need to safeguard pupils' well-being, in accordance with statutory provisions
- 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 White, 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 White 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 and also involves an inappropriate relationship with a pupil which occurred over a period of approximately three years, despite management advice to limit his contact with Pupil A.

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 White, 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 safeguard pupils. The panel has observed, *“In the light of the panel’s findings against Mr White, there was a strong public interest consideration in respect of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils, given the serious findings that Mr White was involved in an inappropriate relationship with Pupil A over a period of three years and dishonest concealment of the relationship from the School”*.

The panel also note that Mr White’s behaviour, *“...may have led to Pupil A being exposed to the behaviour in a harmful way, having regard to the safeguarding failures that Mr White’s conduct represented. The panel was presented with evidence from Pupil B that Pupil A had been mocked by other pupils about her relationship with Mr White. Pupil C’s evidence was that the relationship remained the subject of gossip throughout the School after Mr White left”*.

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

I have also taken into account the panel’s comments on insight and remorse, which the panel sets out as follows, *“The panel found that Mr White had demonstrated significant insight. Mr White had explained in his evidence the various ways in which he now understood that Pupil A could have been negatively impacted by his conduct. Mr White also demonstrated a clear understanding of the impact on the School and on his colleagues. Mr White had explained how events in his own life had informed his approach to the situation with Pupil A, an approach he had accepted was inappropriate and wrong. The panel found Mr White’s insight on that link to be significant and positive”*.

The panel has also commented that Mr White *“...now recognised and had a full understanding of the reasons why he had, wrongly, not followed the advice given to him by the School concerning his relationship with Pupil A”*.

The panel has also commented that the risk of repetition of this behaviour is low *“...as there was a full understanding on Mr White’s part about why he had conducted himself as he had”*.

I also note the four positive character references the panel has seen.

I have given the panel's findings on Mr White's insight and remorse weight in reaching my decision. However, I am also mindful that a low risk of repetition means that there remains some risk of repetition of this behaviour, and this puts the future wellbeing of pupils at risk.

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 White 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 White himself. The panel comment "*Mr White had not demonstrated evidence of exceptionally high standards in his personal and professional conduct or of having contributed significantly to the education sector*". However, the panel also note, "*The panel accepted that the conduct was out of character*".

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

In this case, I have placed weight on the panel's comments concerning Mr White's insight or remorse, which the panel describe as significant insight and genuine remorse.

I have also placed considerable weight on the findings of the panel. These elements are the finding dishonesty, the deliberate nature of the misconduct and the duration over which the proven conduct occurred. The panel has also found that there was no evidence of extreme duress. I have also considered the actual and risk of harm to Pupil A and the panel's findings on the risk of repetition of the behaviour.

I have given less weight in my consideration of sanction therefore, to the contribution that Mr White has made to the profession. In my view, it is necessary to impose a prohibition order in order to maintain public confidence in the profession. A published decision, in light of the circumstances in this case, the seriousness of the conduct and the risk of harm to pupils, does not in my view satisfy the public interest requirement concerning public confidence in the profession.

For these reasons, I have concluded that a prohibition order is proportionate and in the public interest in order to achieve the intended aims of a prohibition order.

I have gone on to consider the matter of a review period.

I have considered the Advice, which lists factors which may weigh in favour of a longer review period. Whilst the panel has found that Mr White's conduct was dishonest, there is no finding of serious dishonesty, and as such I do not find that any of the factors listed in the Advice are present.

I have also considered the panel's findings on Mr White's significant insight and genuine remorse as well as the character references provided to the panel.

In my view, allowing a two-year review period (the statutory minimum) reflects the seriousness of the findings and is a proportionate period to achieve the aim of maintaining public confidence in the profession. This period will afford Mr White the opportunity to further reflect on the proven conduct and reduce the risk of repetition even further.

I consider therefore that a two-year review period is required to satisfy the maintenance of public confidence in the profession.

This means that Mr Stephen White 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 02 April 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 White remains prohibited from teaching indefinitely.

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

Mr White 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: 27 March 2026

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