



Ms Catherine Stephenson: Professional conduct panel hearing outcome

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

June 2026

Contents

Introduction	3
Allegations	4
Summary of evidence	4
Documents	4
Witnesses	5
Decision and reasons	5
Findings of fact	6
Panel's recommendation to the Secretary of State	12
Decision and reasons on behalf of the Secretary of State	15

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

Teacher: Ms Catherine Stephenson
Teacher ref number: 2072028
Teacher date of birth: 25 December 1980
TRA reference: 23847
Date of determination: 19 June 2026
Former employer: Snowflake School, London

Introduction

A professional conduct panel (“the panel”) of the Teaching Regulation Agency (“the TRA”) convened on 17 to 19 June 2026 by way of a virtual hearing, to consider the case of Ms Catherine Stephenson.

The panel members were Mr Stephen Chappell (lay panellist – in the chair), Mrs Sofia McGreavy (lay panellist) and Mrs Shelley Barlow-Ward (teacher panellist).

The legal adviser to the panel was Ms Lara Small of Birketts LLP solicitors.

The presenting officer for the TRA was Ms Laura Paisley of Mountain Chambers instructed by Brabners LLP solicitors.

Ms Stephenson was not present and was not represented.

The hearing took place in public and was recorded.

Allegations

The panel considered the allegations set out in the Notice of Hearing dated 23 February 2026.

It was alleged that Ms Stephenson was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct which may bring the profession into disrepute in that:

1. On 16 April 2024, while employed by the Snowflake School, she:
 - a. Purchased alcohol during hours she was required to be working.
 - b. Brought alcohol onto school premises.
 - c. Consumed alcohol while on school premises.
 - d. Consumed alcohol during school hours.
 - e. Was under the influence of alcohol while at work.

Ms Stephenson did not respond to the Notice of Hearing and thereby made no admission in respect of allegations 1(a), 1(b), 1(c), 1(d), or 1(e).

Summary of evidence

Documents

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

Section 1: Notice of hearing and proof of service – pages 3 to 26

Section 2: Witness statements and exhibits – pages 27 to 67

Section 3: TRA documents – pages 68 to 161

In addition, the panel agreed to accept the following:

- document showing proof of delivery of the TRA's hearing bundle on 25 February 2026, and a signature on delivery signed for by '*Cathrine*'.
- The exhibit marked as '[REDACTED]' in the witness statement of Witness B, being a copy of two WhatsApp messages sent by Ms Stephenson to Witness B on 16 April 2024; and
- The exhibit marked as '[REDACTED]' in the witness statement of Witness B, being an email exchange between Witness B and Witness A on 16 April 2024.

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, May 2020 (the "Procedures").

Witnesses

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

- Witness A – [REDACTED]
- Witness B – [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.

In September 2017, Ms Stephenson commenced employment at Snowflake School ('the School') as a lead teacher and was subsequently promoted to Assistant Headteacher and Deputy Safeguarding Lead on 2 November 2020.

On 16 April 2024, it was alleged that Ms Stephenson was seen purchasing a bottle of wine in a local shop at around 8:45am in the morning while she was late for work and required to be on site.

Later that same morning, several staff reported concerns about Ms Stephenson's behaviour and repeated trips to the toilet carrying her bag. A bottle of white wine was later found in Ms Stephenson's bag by Witness B, which was more than half empty at approximately 11:52am.

Later that same day, Ms Stephenson was suspended from work.

On 17 April 2024, the School held a meeting with the Local Authority Designated Officer ("LADO") and the LADO advised the School to carry out an investigation.

The School carried out an internal investigation into the events of 16 April 2024, and Ms Stephenson was invited to a disciplinary hearing.

On 14 May 2024, Ms Stephenson failed to attend her disciplinary hearing and she was dismissed.

On 6 June 2024, a referral was made by the School 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. On 16 April 2024, while employed by the Snowflake School, you:

a. Purchased alcohol during hours you were required to be working.

The panel noted that Ms Stephenson had not responded and therefore made no admission in respect of allegation 1(a).

The panel considered the written witness statements dated 16 April 2024 provided to Witness A, [REDACTED] at the time of the School's investigation. The panel noted that in the first statement, Individual A described that she *"had gone to the off licence this morning and had seen Catherine purchasing a bottle of wine, I did not want to make any assumptions as to why, I mentioned it to Individual B who then raised it with Individual C."*

The panel further noted the statement of Individual E dated 16 April 2024, in which she stated *"this morning it was mentioned to me by another member of staff that Catherine was in the local off license purchasing a bottle of wine and this prompted myself and Individual D to communicate our concerns to Individual C."*

The panel noted the contemporaneous written statement of Witness B dated 16 April 2024 in which she stated *"It was reported that another staff member had also observed Catherine going to a nearby shop before the school day begun and had been seen purchasing a bottle of wine."*

The panel noted that in Witness B's witness statement dated 12 June 2025, she stated that *"we are expected to be at school before 08:30am at the latest"*. Witness B stated that on 16 April 2024, she was aware that Ms Stephenson was late to School that day because she shared an office with her. Witness B stated that *"staff members have a WhatsApp group where we report if we are running late"* and that *"Ms Stephenson messaged that group on the morning of 16 April 2024 to let other members of staff know she was going to be late."* When asked in her oral evidence how late Ms Stephenson was that day, Witness B stated that although she could not recall for definite, it was approximately after 9am that Ms Stephenson arrived at work.

The panel noted that in Witness A's oral evidence, she stated that teachers (including Ms Stephenson) were required to be at the School *"by 8am really, although 8:15am latest because the pupils arrive at school at 8:30am"*. The panel concurred that based on their

own experience, a senior leader would be expected to be at the School in good time before any pupils arrive.

The panel considered the witness statement of Witness A dated 25 June 2025, in which she stated that *“Individual A...reported to Individual C as the [REDACTED] that she had seen Ms Stephenson at a shop at 08:45am purchasing a bottle of wine.”* The panel further noted that in Witness A’s witness statement, she described that later that day on 16 April 2024 Witness A had informed Ms Stephenson over the phone that she was aware that Ms Stephenson had been to the shops that morning and that another member of staff had seen her purchasing a bottle of wine. Witness A described that Ms Stephenson’s response to this was that the wine was for her and her partner to have with dinner that evening. When questioned in her oral evidence, Witness A confirmed that Ms Stephenson had admitted to her during that phone call that she had purchased a bottle of wine at the shop that morning.

On balance, given the consistency of accounts given by the witnesses, the panel concluded it was more likely than not that Ms Stephenson did purchase alcohol in the morning during hours she was required to be working on 16 April 2024.

The panel therefore found allegation 1(a) proven.

b. Brought alcohol onto school premises.

The panel noted that Ms Stephenson had not responded and therefore made no admission in respect of allegation 1(b).

The panel considered the witness statement of Witness B dated 12 June 2025 in which she stated that on 16 April 2024 *“I was instructed by Witness A to look inside [Ms Stephenson’s] bag. Upon opening the bag, I saw...underneath was a bottle of wine. I then took the bottle out of the bag, and I could see that this bottle of white wine was more than half empty.”* The panel noted the contents of Witness B’s contemporaneous written statement dated 16 April 2024 in which she stated *“I was asked to look into Catherine’s blue backpack. In the bag underneath clothing was a bottle of white wine this was at approximately 11:52am.”* The panel noted that in her oral evidence, Witness B was able to describe that the bottle of wine was a screw top.

The panel noted the witness statement of Witness A dated 25 June 2025 in which she stated that *“following my phone call with Individual F, she reported to me that she found Ms Stephenson to confirm that she needed to leave the site. Ms Stephenson agreed to leave the site but before she left, she opened her bag and pulled out the bottle of wine which was now filled to the brim.”* The panel noted that this was hearsay evidence given Individual F had not given oral evidence to the panel, and the panel therefore attached less weight to it.

The panel further noted that in Witness A's witness statement, she stated that on 16 April 2024 during her phone call with Ms Stephenson, she *"asked Ms Stephenson to confirm that she had not drunk any of the wine. I also asked Ms Stephenson to confirm that if I was to open her bag, I would find a completely full bottle of wine. Ms Stephenson confirmed both."* The panel therefore considered this to be an admission by Ms Stephenson that she had brought alcohol onto School premises on 16 April 2024.

The panel found allegation 1(b) proven.

c. Consumed alcohol while on school premises.

d. Consumed alcohol during school hours.

The panel noted that Ms Stephenson had not responded and therefore made no admission in respect of allegations 1(c) or 1(d).

The panel noted its findings above that it was more likely than not that Ms Stephenson had purchased a bottle of wine at around 8:45am in the morning on 16 April 2024 and had brought this bottle of wine onto School premises. The panel considered Witness B's contemporaneous written statement dated 16 April 2024 in which she stated *"I was asked to look into Catherine's blue backpack. In the bag underneath clothing was a bottle of white wine this was at approximately 11:52am. I held the bottle straight where I could clearly see that it was more than half empty."* When questioned in her oral evidence, Witness B confirmed that she could clearly recall this.

In Witness B's contemporaneous written statement dated 16 April 2024 she stated *"During the morning I observed Catherine on more than 5 occasions to leave the office and go to the toilet taking her blue bag with her. On approximately the 3rd occasion, she did not return with the bag."* When questioned in her oral evidence, Witness B confirmed that she shared an office with Ms Stephenson and stated that she had assumed at the time that Ms Stephenson was going to the toilet on these occasions when she left the office, because there would not necessarily have been any other reason for her to leave the office. In her oral evidence, Witness B stated that whilst she could not recall exactly, she recalled that Ms Stephenson was absent from the office for roughly between 3-5 minutes on each occasion.

The panel carefully considered the evidence available to it before reaching its decision. The panel noted in particular that there were no direct witnesses who witnessed Ms Stephenson consuming alcohol on School premises or during School hours on 16 April 2024. The panel was particularly mindful of the fact that Ms Stephenson was not present at the hearing to give her account.

However, the panel considered Witness B to be a credible witness as her accounts were consistent and balanced and she conceded on points she could not genuinely recall. The

panel was also conscious that Ms Stephenson had had ample opportunities to challenge the allegations against her that she had consumed alcohol during work time in the School building, both at the School's disciplinary hearing (which she failed to attend) and during the course of these proceedings. Ms Stephenson had not provided any challenge or alternative account, and the panel had the discretion to draw inferences from this. The panel had no evidence before it of any plausible innocent explanation as to why the bottle of wine that Ms Stephenson bought in the morning on 16 April 2024 would be half full at around 11:52am, other than that Ms Stephenson had consumed it. The panel noted that it is not possible to buy a half-full bottle of wine. The panel noted that it had the ability to draw inferences based on the evidence available to it, in the absence of any other plausible innocent explanation.

The panel therefore considered on the balance of probabilities that it was more likely than not that Ms Stephenson had consumed half of the bottle of wine during the course of that morning on 16 April 2024 on School premises and during School hours.

The panel therefore found allegations 1(c) and 1(d) proven.

e. Were under the influence of alcohol while at work.

The panel noted that Ms Stephenson had not responded and therefore made no admission in respect of allegation 1(e).

The panel considered the oral evidence of Witness B in which she confirmed that she did not recall smelling alcohol on Ms Stephenson on 16 April 2024, nor did she personally witness any particular concerns about Ms Stephenson's behaviour that day as she didn't have any direct conversations with her whilst they worked in the office together that morning. However, the panel noted that Witness B's evidence was consistent in that Ms Stephenson's behaviour in leaving the office and taking her backpack with her on over four occasions during the course of the morning was out of character.

The panel noted the contents of Witness A's witness statement dated 25 June 2025 in which she stated that on 16 April 2024 *"I received a call from Individual C. On this call, Individual C reported that Ms Stephenson had arrived at the school late again and she raised serious concerns about Ms Stephenson's manner. Individual C continued to explain how three members of staff had also raised concerns to her about Ms Stephenson's behaviour that morning."* The panel noted that this contained multiple hearsay evidence and therefore attached less weight to it.

The panel noted the contents of the written statement by Individual E dated 16 April 2024 which stated that *"before the half term myself and multiple members of staff had noticed a smell of alcohol off of Catherine and slight changes in her behaviour (interactions with staff and pupils) she had been quite repetitive and more present than usual which I found to be out of character for her, she has also been frequently going to the toilet with her bag a lot*

I can't assume that she has been drinking whilst on school premises but I have definitely smelt it, this morning..." The panel attached less weight to this evidence as hearsay evidence and also considered that it was unclear around the timing of exactly when Ms Stephenson was alleged to have been regularly going to the toilet with her bag.

The panel noted its findings above that it was more likely than not that Ms Stephenson had purchased a bottle of wine in the morning on 16 April 2024, had brought this bottle of wine onto School premises and had consumed half of this bottle of wine during the hours of around 9am to midday.

The panel noted that the allegation did not require the panel to make a judgment about how much or how little Ms Stephenson had drunk on 16 April 2024, but simply that she had been under the influence of alcohol while at work. The panel noted that the evidence suggested it was more likely than not that Ms Stephenson was presenting in a way which was sufficient to be a cause for concern on 16 April 2024, which ultimately led to more than one colleague reporting Ms Stephenson's behaviour to [REDACTED].

On balance, therefore, the panel concluded that given Ms Stephenson had consumed half a bottle of wine in around three hours on 16 April 2024, then she must have been under the influence of alcohol while at work.

The panel found allegation 1(e) proven.

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

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

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

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

The panel considered that, by reference to Part 2, Ms Stephenson 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
 - 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, and maintain high standards in their own attendance and punctuality.
- Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

The panel also considered whether Ms Stephenson'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 was relevant.

The panel noted that there was nothing in the School's Staff Code of Conduct which explicitly stated that teachers should not bring alcohol onto School premises. However, the panel considered Witness B's oral evidence in which she confirmed that it was known by teachers that the School's practice was not to bring alcohol onto the School site. The panel noted that Ms Stephenson had breached the School's Disciplinary, Dismissal and Capability Procedure which provided that gross misconduct included "*being under the influence of...alcohol during working hours or any additional hours of work for the School or when otherwise engaged on School business.*" The panel also noted that the School's Staff Code of Conduct made reference to the School's Disciplinary, Dismissal and Capability Procedure.

The panel considered that Ms Stephenson's actions in consuming half a bottle of wine during working hours at the School's site presented a safeguarding risk to pupils. The panel was mindful that the pupils at the School were all [REDACTED]. The panel considered that due to the significant needs of the pupils, there needed to be heightened vigilance in relation to their care. The panel further noted that Ms Stephenson was the Assistant Headteacher with responsibility for the secondary school pupils and that she was also the Deputy Safeguarding Lead with safeguarding responsibilities for the pupils. The panel concluded that there was a real safeguarding risk to pupils given Ms Stephenson was under the influence of alcohol whilst at School, thereby her functions and decision-making capabilities would likely have been impaired.

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

Accordingly, the panel was satisfied that Ms Stephenson was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct.

In relation to whether Ms Stephenson'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 Ms Stephenson'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 Ms Stephenson was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct, the panel found that none of these offences were relevant.

The panel noted that the advice is not intended to be exhaustive and there may be other behaviours that panels consider to be "*conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute*".

The panel considered that Ms Stephenson's actions in consuming half a bottle of wine during the course of the morning on 16 April 2024 whilst at School and responsible for pupils, would likely have a negative impact on the public's perception of Ms Stephenson as a teacher. The panel noted in particular the vulnerability of the pupils at the School and the fact that Ms Stephenson was the Assistant Headteacher and Deputy Safeguarding Lead. The panel noted that pupils must be able to view teachers as role models in the way that they behave, and concluded that Ms Stephenson being under the influence of alcohol whilst at work was not behaviour conducive to being a role model for pupils.

The findings of misconduct are serious, and the conduct displayed would be likely to have a negative impact on the individual's status as a teacher.

For these reasons, the panel found that Ms Stephenson'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 within the teaching profession.

In light of the panel's findings against Ms Stephenson, which involved purchasing alcohol during working hours, bringing it onto School premises, and consuming it while on site during School hours, there was a strong public interest consideration in respect of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils.

Similarly, the panel considered that public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Ms Stephenson 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 Ms Stephenson 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 Ms Stephenson in the profession. The panel had no evidence of Ms Stephenson's ability as an educator. The panel considered that the adverse public interest considerations above outweighed any interest in retaining Ms Stephenson in the profession, since her 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.

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 Ms Stephenson.

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.

Even though some of the behaviour found proved in this case indicated that a prohibition order would be appropriate, the panel went on to consider the mitigating factors. Mitigating factors may indicate that a prohibition order would not be appropriate or proportionate.

There was no evidence that Ms Stephenson's actions were not deliberate.

There was no evidence to suggest that Ms Stephenson was acting under extreme duress, e.g. a physical threat or significant intimidation.

The panel had no evidence that Ms Stephenson had demonstrated exceptionally high standards in her personal and professional conduct or that she had contributed significantly to the education sector. The panel noted there were no character references provided. The panel considered that the documentary evidence suggested that there had been earlier concerns raised prior to 16 April 2024 which, although did not indicate a significant pattern of behaviour, suggested that Ms Stephenson's actions on 16 April 2024 were not out of character.

The panel considered whether Ms Stephenson had demonstrated insight, remorse, and any other mitigating factors in respect of her conduct. Given Ms Stephenson's complete lack of engagement in this process and the School's disciplinary process, the panel had no evidence before it of any insight, remorse or mitigating factors presented in respect of her conduct on 16 April 2024. The panel noted that there was no evidence of Ms Stephenson having insight into the potential impact of her actions on pupils or colleagues, and therefore the panel considered that there was a potential risk of future repetition.

[REDACTED].

Further, the panel did not identify any clear expressions of remorse from Ms Stephenson for the conduct itself.

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

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

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

Stephenson. Drinking alcohol whilst on the School's site was a significant factor in forming that opinion. Accordingly, the panel made a recommendation to the Secretary of State that a prohibition order should be imposed with immediate effect.

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

The Advice indicates that there are certain types of case where, if relevant, the public interest will have greater relevance and weigh in favour of not offering a review period.

None of the listed characteristics were engaged by the panel's findings.

The Advice also indicates that there are certain other types of cases where it is likely that the public interest will have greater relevance and weigh in favour of a longer period before a review is considered appropriate.

None of the listed characteristics were engaged by the panel's findings.

Despite having no evidence from Ms Stephenson of any remorse or insight into her actions, and despite the seriousness of Ms Stephenson's behaviour in drinking alcohol whilst at School and the safeguarding risks that entailed, the panel noted that this was a one-time incident that occurred during the course of a morning, and that there was no evidence that any pupils or teachers were in fact harmed as a result of Ms Stephenson's conduct. On balance therefore, the panel considered that it would be proportionate to recommend a review period.

The panel decided that the findings indicated a situation in which a review period would be appropriate and, as such, decided that it would be proportionate, in all the circumstances, for the prohibition order to be recommended with provisions for a review period. The panel considered that a review period of two years would be proportionate in this case.

Decision and reasons on behalf of the Secretary of State

I have given very careful consideration to this case and to the recommendation of the panel in respect of both sanction and review period.

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

In this case, the panel has found all of the allegations proven and found that those proven facts amount to unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

The panel has made a recommendation to the Secretary of State that Ms Catherine Stephenson should be the subject of a prohibition order, with a review period of two years.

In particular, the panel has found that Ms Stephenson 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
 - 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, and maintain high standards in their own attendance and punctuality.
- Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

The panel finds that the conduct of Ms Stephenson fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession.

The findings of misconduct are particularly serious as they include a finding of drinking alcohol on the school site, during the school day.

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 Ms Stephenson, 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 light of the panel's findings against Ms Stephenson, which involved purchasing alcohol during working hours, bringing it onto School premises, and consuming it while on site during School hours, there was a strong public interest*

consideration in respect of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils.” 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,

“Given Ms Stephenson’s complete lack of engagement in this process and the School’s disciplinary process, the panel had no evidence before it of any insight, remorse or mitigating factors presented in respect of her conduct on 16 April 2024. The panel noted that there was no evidence of Ms Stephenson having insight into the potential impact of her actions on pupils or colleagues, and therefore the panel considered that there was a potential risk of future repetition.”

The panel has also commented that it *“...did not identify any clear expressions of remorse from Ms Stephenson for the conduct itself.”* In my judgement, the lack of evidence of any insight or remorse means that there is some risk of the repetition of this behaviour, and this puts at risk the future wellbeing of pupils. I have therefore given this element considerable weight in reaching my decision.

I have gone on to consider the extent to which a prohibition order would maintain public confidence in the profession. The panel observe, *“...the panel considered that public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Ms Stephenson were not treated with the utmost seriousness when regulating the conduct of the profession.”*

I am particularly mindful of the finding of drinking alcohol on the school’s site and the impact this would have on 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 Ms Stephenson herself. The panel comment, *“The panel had no evidence that Ms Stephenson had demonstrated exceptionally high standards in her personal and professional conduct or that she had contributed significantly to the education sector.”*

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

In this case, I have placed considerable weight on the panel's comments concerning the lack of any evidence of insight or remorse in addition to the panel's comments on the seriousness of the conduct.

I have given less weight in my consideration of sanction therefore, to the contribution that Ms Stephenson 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, that is not backed up by any evidence of remorse or insight, does not in my view satisfy the public interest requirement concerning public confidence in the profession.

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

I have gone on to consider the matter of a review period. In this case, the panel has recommended a two-year review period.

I have considered the panel's comments,

"Despite having no evidence from Ms Stephenson of any remorse or insight into her actions, and despite the seriousness of Ms Stephenson's behaviour in drinking alcohol whilst at School and the safeguarding risks that entailed, the panel noted that this was a one-time incident that occurred during the course of a morning, and that there was no evidence that any pupils or teachers were in fact harmed as a result of Ms Stephenson's conduct. On balance therefore, the panel considered that it would be proportionate to recommend a review period."

The panel has also said that a two-year review period would be appropriate and proportionate in all of the circumstances.

I have considered whether a two-year review period reflects the seriousness of the findings and is a proportionate period to achieve the aim of maintaining public confidence in the profession. In this case, factors mean that a two-year review period is sufficient to achieve the aim of maintaining public confidence in the profession. These elements are the seriousness of the conduct and the lack of any evidence of insight and remorse, balanced with the panel's finding that this was a one-time incident which did not result in actual harm to teachers or pupils.

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

This means that Ms Catherine Stephenson is prohibited from teaching indefinitely and cannot teach in any school, sixth form college, relevant youth accommodation or children's home in England. She may apply for the prohibition order to be set aside, but not until 24 June 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 she does apply, a panel will meet to consider whether the prohibition order should be set aside. Without a successful application, Ms Stephenson remains prohibited from teaching indefinitely.

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

Ms Stephenson has a right of appeal to the High Court within 28 days from the date she is given notice of this order.



Decision maker: Stuart Blomfield

Date: 24 June 2026

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