



Mr Lee Nicholson: Professional conduct panel hearing outcome

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

August 2026

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

Teacher: Mr Lee Nicholson

Teacher ref number: 0974974

Teacher date of birth: 14 December 1986

TRA reference: 23705

Date of determination: 6 August 2026

Former employer: Aston Academy, Sheffield

Introduction

A professional conduct panel ('the panel') of the Teaching Regulation Agency ('the TRA') convened on 3 to 6 August 2026 by way of a virtual hearing, to consider the case of Mr Lee Nicholson.

The panel members were Mr Richard Young (lay panellist – in the chair), Mr Ian McKim (lay panellist) and Ms Elizabeth Pollitt (teacher panellist).

The legal adviser to the panel was Mr James Corrish of Birketts LLP solicitors.

The presenting officer for the TRA was Mr Jim Olphert of Mountford Chambers instructed by Brabners LLP.

Mr Nicholson was not present and was not represented.

The hearing took place in public, save those parts which proceeded in private, and was recorded.

Allegations

The panel considered the allegations set out in the notice of hearing dated 24 April 2026 as varied in accordance with the preliminary application to amend the allegations which the panel considered and accepted at the commencement of the hearing.

It was alleged that Mr Nicholson was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute in that whilst working as a Teacher at Aston Academy ('the School'):

Conduct

1. Between September 2014 and September 2018 he engaged in and/or developed an inappropriate relationship with Student A by:
 - a. engaging in inappropriate communication with Student A:
 - i. using his personal email and/or mobile number and/or social media account;
 - ii. within which he encouraged Student A take recreational drugs;
 - iii. within which he encouraged Student A to masturbate;
 - iv. within which he shared personal information and/or pictures of himself;
 - v. within which on or around 25 March 2016, he invited Student A to share her location with him via the application Life360.
 - vi. by on one or more occasions video calling Student A;
 - vii. which was sexual in nature.
 - b. spending excessive one-on-one time with Student A at the School when he did not have good reason to do so.
 - c. engaging in inappropriate physical contact with Student A by:
 - i. holding Student A's hand;
 - ii. cuddling Student A;
 - iii. touching the top of Student A's thigh near her groin;
 - iv. having Student A sit on his knee;
 - v. lying on top of Student A;

- vi. stroking Student A's face with his hand;
 - vii. grabbing Student A by the arm and dragging them out from the cupboard within a classroom.
 - viii. allowing Student A to:
 - 1. place their hand on his upper thigh and/or groin
 - 2. kiss him.
 - d. giving one or more gifts to Student A as set out in Schedule 1.
 - e. on one or more occasions locking him and Student A alone inside a meeting room at the School.
 - f. on one or more occasions hiding Student A inside a cupboard within a classroom at the School.
2. His conduct as described at paragraphs 1.c.vii and/or 1.e. and/or 1.f. was dishonest and/or displayed a lack of integrity in that he intended to conceal his relationship with Student A from others.
3. On one or more occasions during April 2017 and/or August 2017 he failed to act appropriately and/ or ensure appropriate action was taken to safeguard Student A [REDACTED].
4. On one or more occasions between September 2016 and August 2018 he said to Student A words to the effect that, if his relationship with Student A was revealed to others he:
- a. would "drive [his] car off the road";
 - b. "had a suicide note in [his] drawer".
5. His conduct as described at paragraph 4 above was dishonest and/or displayed a lack of integrity in that he intended to pressure Student A not to reveal his relationship with Student A to others.
6. On one or more occasions between September 2021 and September 2023, he invited and/or allowed Student A into his home.
7. His conduct as described at paragraph 1 above
- a. breached professional boundaries;
 - b. was sexually motivated.

Conviction

He has been convicted of a relevant offence, namely:

8. On 12 April 2024 at Sheffield Magistrates' Court, he was convicted of:

- a. possession of a controlled drug of class A, namely cocaine, contrary to Section 5(1) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.
- b. possession of a controlled drug of class A, namely methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA), contrary to Section 5(1) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.
- c. possession of a controlled drug of class B, namely cannabis, contrary to Section 5(1) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.
- d. possession of a controlled drug of class C, namely Etizolam, Diazepam, contrary to Section 5(1) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

[REDACTED]

Mr Nicholson admitted the facts of allegations 1(a)(i), 1(a)(iv)-(vii), 1(b), 1(c)(i), 1(c)(ii), 1(c)(iv), 1(c)(vi), 1(c)(vii), 1(d), 1(e), 3, 4(b), 6, 7(a), and 8. Mr Nicholson denied the facts of allegations 1(a)(ii), 1(a)(iii), 1(c)(iii), 1(c)(v), 1(c)(viii)(1), 1(c)(viii)(2), 1(f), 2, 4, 5, and 7(b).

Mr Nicholson further admitted that those allegations which he had admitted amounted to unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute and/or conviction of a relevant offence as applicable.

Though the panel carefully noted Mr Nicholson's admissions the panel proceeded to carefully consider all of the allegations, proceeding on the basis that the hearing was fully contested.

Summary of evidence

Documents

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

Section A: Notice of proceedings – pages 3 to 20

Section B: TRA witness evidence – pages 21 to 374

Section C: TRA documents – pages 375 to 697

Section D: Teacher documents – pages 698 to 734

The panel members confirmed that they had read all of the documents within the bundle, in advance of the hearing.

In the consideration of this case, the panel had regard to the 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:

Student A – [REDACTED]

Person 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.

Mr Nicholson commenced employment as a physics teacher at the School on 1 September 2010. On 1 September 2016, he was appointed as a leader of post-16 provision at the School.

It was alleged that between September 2014 and September 2018, while Student A was a pupil at the School, Mr Nicholson engaged in inappropriate communication with Student A including via email and social media and regularly met her alone in the School.

On 24 March 2023, Mr Nicholson was arrested for the alleged offence of “*causing or inciting a female child under 16 to engage in sexual activity*” in relation to allegations made by Student A. His home was searched and the police allegedly found controlled substances. Mr Nicholson was not prosecuted for “*causing or inciting a female child under 16 to engage in sexual activity*”.

Mr Nicholson was suspended from his position at the School on 27 March 2023 pending investigation. In January 2024, the School commenced an internal investigation into the allegations and Mr Nicholson left the School’s employment on 29 April 2024.

On 12 April 2024, Mr Nicholson was convicted at Sheffield Magistrates’ Court of four offences related to possession of controlled drugs which were found in his home and

subject to a fine of £250 and an order that the substances be forfeited and destroyed. He was ordered to pay a surcharge to fund victim services of £400, and to pay costs of £85 to the Crown Prosecution Service.

The matter was referred to the TRA on 13 May 2024.

Findings of fact

The findings of fact are as follows:

The panel reminded itself at the outset that Mr Nicholson had chosen not to attend the hearing and therefore that his evidence would not be tested either by cross examination or through panel questions. The panel acknowledged that the evidence of Mr Nicholson was therefore hearsay and, whilst it considered it fair and appropriate and in the interests of justice that his evidence was admitted and considered, the panel determined that it would place less weight on the evidence of Mr Nicholson than it would place on the evidence of live witnesses, recognising that it could not be tested.

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

- 1. Between September 2014 and September 2018 you engaged in and/or developed an inappropriate relationship with Student A by:**
 - a. engaging in inappropriate communication with Student A:**
 - i. using your personal email and/or mobile number and/or social media account;**

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson admitted this allegation as set out in his undated written statement. Notwithstanding this, the panel made a determination based on the evidence available to it.

The panel considered a chain of emails between Mr Nicholson and Student A from December 2015 onwards. The panel noted, in particular, the frequency of correspondence and the length of the messages which were often informal, familiar and conversational in nature, including regarding Mr Nicholson's holidays and private life. The panel noted that a large amount of the correspondence appeared to date from a time when Mr Nicholson would have been a teacher at the School and Student A, [REDACTED]. On careful review of this correspondence the panel found it painted a picture of a level of intimacy and frequent correspondence, often on sexual subjects, akin to a close interpersonal relationship of a nature fundamentally opposed to any acceptable dynamic between a pupil and teacher.

The panel considered a document from South Yorkshire police setting out messages between Student A and Mr Nicholson on “Google Hangouts”, a social media platform, between August 2016 and June 2020. The panel noted in particular the volume of messages, their frequency and the familiar, often flirtatious, tone.

The panel considered the oral evidence and written statement of Student A, who stated that her relationship with Mr Nicholson was different to her relationships with other staff members at the School in that he was the only teacher she was very close with both inside and outside the School. She stated their relationship started when they were just seeing each other during lesson time and being friendly, but quickly progressed to meeting up alone in his classroom and then to meeting multiple times per day in meeting rooms and their being in constant communication.

Student A stated that by the summer of 2015, [REDACTED], Mr Nicholson and she were communicating via the School e-mail daily and that their conversations were of a personal nature and they did not talk about school related things. She described how in the build up to Christmas 2015 they progressed to emailing on their personal e-mail accounts multiple times per day and regularly stayed up late emailing into the early morning.

Student A stated that she could not recall the precise time it happened but, one day, Mr Nicholson emailed her from his personal account and e-mail exchanges between their personal accounts went on from there.

Student A set out in detail in her evidence a substantial amount of the personal and family information which Mr Nicholson had divulged to her during these messages. She detailed how Mr Nicholson suggested she call him “Lee” rather than “Mr Nicholson” or “Sir” and the panel had sight of an e-mail of 4 January 2016 in which he did this.

Student A described that she informed Mr Nicholson in January 2016 that [REDACTED] and that his response was he wanted her to face her fears and still see him without it being awkward. The panel noted correspondence between Mr Nicholson and Student A of 12 January 2016 in which it appeared that Student A was seeking to suggest that they returned to being “*student and teacher*” and Mr Nicholson appeared to strongly resist any such suggestion saying “*you mean too much to me*” and “*whatever you decide I'd still like to be at least very involved with helping you with your physics maths and revision and handling the stress of your exams I think I'm the person in the best position to do that*” and “*whatever you do, don't tell anyone any of this please*”.

Student A described that Mr Nicholson talked to her about [REDACTED] how it would be “*a lot easier*” for him if she didn't tell anyone about their messages.

Student A described how, in early 2016, she and Mr Nicholson had progressed to exchanging hundreds of emails per day and Mr Nicholson suggested they move to

Google Hangouts instead of e-mail. She stated they messaged on Google Hangouts from early 2016 until [REDACTED] 2019 at which point they moved to WhatsApp.

Student A also described that Mr Nicholson provided her with his personal mobile phone number and told her to keep it in case she ever needed him and that she could recall the first time he called her on that number in early 2016 after Newcastle United had lost a match and he indicated to her that he wanted to hear her voice to “*cheer him up*”. She stated that they started calling frequently from that point.

The panel found Student A to be plausible and reasoned in giving evidence including in that her evidence was almost entirely consistent with the documentary evidence which it had before it including, as particularised, within the extensive correspondence between her and Mr Nicholson. The panel formed this view including as a result of Student A's evidence being tested within the hearing both by the presenting officer and by the panel.

The panel considered the undated written statement of Mr Nicholson, who admitted that he communicated with Student A using his personal email address and mobile number while she was a pupil at the School, and that this communication continued after she left the School until 2023. He stated that the contact initially arose in the capacity of his providing academic and pastoral support to Student A, [REDACTED] particularly in relation to her GCSE exams. Mr Nicholson stated that the communication initially took place by email, later moved to the Google Hangouts messaging service, and subsequently to WhatsApp. He also stated that Student A occasionally contacted him by calling his personal mobile. The panel noted that Mr Nicholson accepted that providing and using his personal contact details in this way was contrary to school policy and safeguarding procedures and represented a serious error of judgement. He stated that the communications were motivated by concern for Student A's welfare and support needs.

The panel considered that the evidence which it had, including the extensive and often intensely personal correspondence between Mr Nicholson and Student A whilst they were in the respective positions of teacher and pupil, clearly constituted engagement in and/or development of an inappropriate relationship by Mr Nicholson with Student A in the form of his engaging in inappropriate communication with Student A using his personal email and/or mobile number and/or social media account.

Having considered the admitted facts and the supporting evidence, the panel found allegation 1(a)(i) proved.

ii. within which you encouraged Student A take recreational drugs;

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson denied this allegation as set out in his undated written statement.

The panel considered a document setting out messages between Student A and Mr Nicholson on Google Hangouts, between August 2016 and June 2020. The panel noted a message from Student A on 24 April 2017 which stated, [REDACTED].

The panel had sight of screenshots of messages between Mr Nicholson and Student A from November to December 2017 in which they had discussed Mr Nicholson's experiences with drugs. The panel noted Mr Nicholson's statements that *"I told myself I'd never have these drugs the night before a work day", "you used to be able to buy heroin and opium over the counter in this country... I bet it was safer then than now", "I've never taken crack or heroin but apart from that any that you can name I probably have"*.

The panel considered a transcript which it had of an interview between Student A and the police in which she was recorded as stating *"when I was about 16 he spoke to me a lot about drugs, like different types of drugs and their effect in a very positive way, like I'm not very clued up on stuff like that anyway and he discussed them in a way with me that felt like he was encouraging me to take them"*.

The panel considered the oral evidence and written statement of Student A, who stated that in 2017 Mr Nicholson disclosed to her that he had smoked weed in the evening and then taught at school the next day. She stated that he told her about some of the festivals he had been to, describing them as drug heavy places where he'd taken lots of drugs. She said he sent her a list of the drugs he had taken and explained the side effects, which ones he liked and did not like and which ones she should try.

The panel considered the written statement of Mr Nicholson, who denied that he had ever encouraged Student A to use recreational drugs. The panel noted that Mr Nicholson stated that he discussed his own past drug use with Student A in response to her questions, but that the discussions did not amount to encouragement. He further stated that, on one occasion, he actively discouraged Student A from using cannabis, [REDACTED].

The panel considered the evidence which it had, in particular noting the evidence of Student A, which was both that Mr Nicholson told her which type of drugs she should try and talked extensively about drugs with her and her clear impression that he was encouraging her to take drugs.

The panel noted that these conversations, including those of which it had seen direct evidence were clearly entirely inappropriate conversations as between a teacher and a pupil.

The panel was satisfied on the balance of probabilities that within the inappropriate communication in which he engaged with Student A as part of his engaging in/developing an inappropriate relationship with her, Mr Nicholson had encouraged Student A to take recreational drugs.

The panel found allegation 1(a)(ii) proved.

iii. within which you encouraged Student A to masturbate;

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson denied this allegation as set out in his undated written statement.

The panel considered a document from South Yorkshire police setting out messages between Student A and Mr Nicholson on Google Hangouts between August 2016 and June 2020. The panel noted in particular conversations on 16 August 2016 [REDACTED]. The panel also noted further conversations [REDACTED] on 31 August 2016 when Mr Nicholson stated, [REDACTED].

The panel had regard to screenshots of message conversations between Student A and Mr Nicholson on 19 August in which Student A sent Mr Nicholson a photo of a penis-shaped lolly in a fridge. The panel noted that Mr Nicholson replied “*you should definitely use that as a dildo*”.

[REDACTED]. Student A said that Mr Nicholson incited her to do sexual things to herself and encouraged her to explore sexually and that she needed to figure out what she liked. She indicated that Mr Nicholson referred to masturbation as an “experiment” [REDACTED]. She said he also told her to insert objects into her vagina and offered to give her some of his condoms in order to do this. She stated he specifically told her to insert a penis shaped lolly into her vagina as a dildo.

The panel considered the oral and written evidence of person B. Person B recalled Student A telling her about some sexualised conversation she was having with Mr Nicholson where he was encouraging her to masturbate.

The panel considered the undated written statement of Mr Nicholson, who admitted that he made “*inexcusable*” comments and engaged in inappropriate conversations with Student A regarding a “*penis lolly*” she had received as a gift. However, he stated that the conversations regarding this were light-hearted jokes, not serious suggestions or sexually motivated comments. Mr Nicholson further stated that the “*handful of deeply regrettable comments*” were “*rare exceptions*” not the norm.

The panel considered all the evidence and concluded that it was proven to the relevant standard, including by the correspondence it had seen and Student A’s evidence, that within the inappropriate communication in which he engaged with Student A as part of his engaging in/developing an inappropriate relationship with her, Mr Nicholson had encouraged Student A to masturbate.

The panel found allegation 1(a)(iii) proved.

iv. within which you shared personal information and/or pictures of yourself;

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson admitted this allegation as set out in his undated written statement. Notwithstanding this, the panel made a determination based on the evidence available to it.

The panel considered the chain of emails between Mr Nicholson and Student A from December 2015. The panel noted that the content of these emails was conversational and personal, and Mr Nicholson shared details such as when he had his first kiss, his previous relationships, and his ideas about dating and his history of drug taking. The panel also noted emails discussing Student A's ideas for her prom dress, her favourite musicians, and the countries in the world to which Mr Nicholson had travelled. The panel also saw copies of emails in which Mr Nicholson sent pictures of his holidays including pictures of himself travelling.

The panel considered a photograph taken by Mr Nicholson of himself in a mirror wearing a "*onesie*". Student A stated that the onesie had been hers, but she had given it to him as a present and Mr Nicholson had then sent her pictures of him wearing it.

The panel considered the oral evidence and written statement of Student A, who set out that Mr Nicholson divulged, and they discussed, a wide range of personal information to her including details about his family and their issues and circumstances, the places he'd travelled to, what she should wear to the prom, pictures from the inside of his house, details of his social circle, details of his ex-girlfriends [REDACTED]. She stated that he often sent her information about things he wanted her opinion on, or advice about, such as houses and cars. She recalled him sending her a picture of him in the dinosaur onesie which she gave him as a present.

The panel considered the written statement of Mr Nicholson, who accepted that he shared extensive personal information with Student A and stated that, as their communications increased, he discussed aspects of his personal life that were "*inappropriate and unacceptable*" to share with a student. He stated that Student A frequently asked questions about his life and reassured him that it was acceptable to talk to her about personal matters. The panel noted that he accepted that it was his responsibility, not Student A's, to maintain appropriate professional boundaries and to guide the nature of their conversations. Mr Nicholson also stated that he shared a small number of photographs of himself with Student A. These included a photograph of him wearing a "*onesie*" costume that Student A had given him as a gift and which he stated she had specifically asked him to wear and photograph. He further stated that Student A later gave him a "*Borat-style 'mankini'*" and requested a photograph of him wearing it. He stated that he felt "*extremely uncomfortable*" receiving the gift and did not provide the requested photograph.

The panel considered all the evidence and concluded that it was proven to the relevant standard that within the inappropriate communication in which he engaged with Student A, as part of his engaging in/developing an inappropriate relationship with her, Mr Nicholson shared personal information and/or pictures of himself.

Having considered the admitted facts and the supporting evidence, the panel found allegation 1(a)(iv) proved.

v. within which on or around 25 March 2016, you invited Student A to share her location with you via the application Life360.

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson admitted this allegation as set out in his undated written statement. Notwithstanding this, the panel made a determination based on the evidence available to it.

The panel considered a copy of an email from Mr Nicholson to Student A dated 25 March 2016 which contained an invitation to join the app “Life360”, which the panel noted was a mobile application for location sharing.

The panel considered the oral evidence and written statement of Student A, who stated that on 25 March 2016 Mr Nicholson invited her to share her location with him via the app Life 360. Student A referred to the copy of the request which the panel had seen. Student A stated she recalled wanting him to know what she was doing but said she declined to join the app as she did not feel safe with him being able to see her location at all times.

The panel considered the written statement of Mr Nicholson, who accepted that location sharing was enabled between himself and Student A, but stated that he could not recall how it was initiated or by whom. He stated that he believed it arose after Student A [REDACTED]. He further stated that the purpose was to enable assistance to be provided in an emergency.

The panel considered all the evidence and concluded that it was proven to the relevant standard that within the inappropriate communication in which he engaged with Student A, as part of his engaging in/developing an inappropriate relationship with her, Mr Nicholson, on or around 25 March 2016, invited Student A to share her location with him via the application Life360.

Having considered the admitted facts and the supporting evidence, the panel found allegation 1(a)(v) proved.

vi. by on one or more occasions video calling Student A;

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson admitted this allegation as set out in his undated written statement. Notwithstanding this, the panel made a determination based on the evidence available to it.

The panel considered a document setting out messages between Student A and Mr Nicholson on Google Hangouts, a social media platform, between August 2016 and June 2020. The panel noted that Student A sent a message to Mr Nicholson on 8 August 2017, asking, [REDACTED]. Student A sent a further message on 28 August 2017 stating, [REDACTED]. The panel noted Mr Nicholson's response "*what the fuck is the problem with looking at something on my laptop whilst skyping someone, explain it to me*". The panel also considered photos which appeared to show Student A and Mr Nicholson connecting via video call.

The panel considered the oral evidence and written statement of Student A, who stated that she recalled her and Mr Nicholson using Skype in 2016. She stated that sometimes on Skype they would not talk much as he did not want his housemates to hear them. Instead, she stated, they would just watch each other or watch a TV show at the same time.

The panel considered the written statement of Mr Nicholson, who stated that he believed he and Student A had a "*very small*" number of video calls but that this was not a regular occurrence. He further stated that this was not something he would have suggested because of his "*strong aversion to video calls*".

The panel considered all the evidence and concluded that it was proven to the relevant standard that within the inappropriate communication in which he engaged with Student A, as part of his engaging in/developing an inappropriate relationship with her, Mr Nicholson engaged in video calling with Student A on one or more occasions.

Having considered the admitted facts and the supporting evidence, the panel found allegation 1(a)(vi) proved.

vii. which was sexual in nature.

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson admitted this allegation as set out in his undated written statement. Notwithstanding this, the panel made a determination based on the evidence available to it.

The panel considered a document setting out messages between Student A and Mr Nicholson on Google Hangouts between August 2016 and June 2020. The panel noted that large portions of the messages discussed topics of a sexual nature, including masturbation, different sex positions and [REDACTED] sexual preferences and experiences. The panel noted in particular messages between Mr Nicholson and Student A in August 2016 in which they discussed Mr Nicholson's previous sexual experiences, including Student A referencing him telling her previously he had "*a low sex drive*". Student A described explicit images she had seen online [REDACTED]. The panel also noted messages on 31 May 2017 in which Student A [REDACTED]."

The panel considered the oral evidence and written statement of Student A, who stated that Mr Nicholson told her about his sexual relationship [REDACTED]. She stated that he messaged her first to say "*I love you*" [REDACTED]. She stated that he told her about having "*morning glory*" and explained what this meant and that he masturbated every other day. She explained that he told her about the number of sexual partners he had had and details of his sexual experiences and his penis size. The panel also reminded itself of the detailed discussions which they had had surrounding masturbation as set out in the panel's findings in relation to allegation 1 a(iii).

The panel considered the written statement of Mr Nicholson, who admitted that some conversations with Student A included sexual topics. [REDACTED]. The panel noted that Mr Nicholson accepted that he made sexual jokes in response to comments made by Student A. However, he denied that these communications were motivated by sexual gratification or that he intended to engage Student A in sexualised conversations.

The panel considered all the evidence and concluded that it was proven to the relevant standard that a substantial amount of the inappropriate communication in which he engaged with Student A as part of his engaging in/developing an inappropriate relationship with her was sexual in nature, either inherently sexual in places or sexual because of the circumstances in which the communications were made.

Having considered the admitted facts and the supporting evidence, the panel found allegation 1(a)(vii) proved.

b. spending excessive one-on-one time with Student A at the School when you did not have good reason to do so.

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson admitted this allegation as set out in his undated written statement. Notwithstanding this, the panel made a determination based on the evidence available to it.

The panel noted a number of messages between Student A and Mr Nicholson in which it appeared that they were arranging to meet one another.

The panel considered the oral evidence and written statement of Student A, who stated that from January 2016 onwards she was regularly meeting Mr Nicholson at 7am, before School started, in his classroom one to one. She said that at the same time [REDACTED] with Mr Nicholson every day at School one to one and they would both [REDACTED] and sometimes share their food. She stated this continued for a while until he suggested they move to a space where no one could see them so they stopped meeting in the classroom and started meeting in one of the School's meeting rooms.

Student A stated that only staff and sixth formers were allowed down the corridors to access the meeting room so Mr Nicholson would come and collect her to take her to the

meeting room and would lock the door when they were inside. She stated the meeting room was very small, like a cupboard. She stated at first they just used to sit and eat lunch and talk but it quickly became tactile and she would sit on his lap facing inwards with her legs wrapped around him and, on a lot of occasions, they would press their faces together and rub their noses together. She says it happened very regularly and felt like they were meeting up at lunch to be physical and not talk.

Student A said she recalled that when revising for exams in 2016 Mr Nicholson would come to the School at the weekend on a Saturday and make sure it was open for them to go in and do revision. She stated she told her parents it was for revision however they did not revise and would cuddle and she would sit on his lap. She stated that when the exams started at the end of the school term in 2016 they would meet in the meeting room in the morning before the exams and cuddle and that she did not have time to revise or focus on her exams. Student A stated that when she started sixth form nothing changed and they would still meet one to one every day. She stated that Mr Nicholson moved classrooms and put a single desk in the cupboard at the back of the new classroom where, between lessons, he would come to visit her. She stated that in addition to the cupboard in his classroom they used to meet in the music room frequently.

The panel considered the oral and written evidence of Person B who indicated that Student A informed her at some point, potentially around the end of [REDACTED], that her relationship with Mr Nicholson had progressed to their speaking 24/7 and having lunch together every day in a private room with her essentially locked in the cupboard at the back of his classroom. She stated that Student A told her that she was with him at all times during school hours. Person B stated that on her downtime Student A was with Mr Nicholson and Person B rarely saw Student A during her sixth form as she was always with him. Person B stated she never witnessed them sitting in private rooms together although she was aware of it through Student A informing her about it and the fact that Student A was never around.

The panel considered the written statement of Mr Nicholson, who admitted that he spent excessive one-to-one time with Student A while at school and stated that this reflected a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries. He stated that the meetings were usually prompted by Student A's requests for academic or pastoral support, often relating to personal issues or concerns she wished to discuss. He further stated that although he sometimes sought to avoid or limit such meetings, he found it difficult to refuse requests for support, particularly where Student A became upset when support was unavailable. Mr Nicholson stated that some meetings involved general conversation, rather than legitimate educational or pastoral purposes, and recognised that his willingness to accommodate these requests blurred professional boundaries.

The panel carefully considered the evidence before it, noting Mr Nicholson's admissions as to the facts and Student A's detailed evidence. The panel did not consider that Mr

Nicholson's explanations as to his frequent contact with Student A justified that contact and considered that none of his stated reasons warranted his direct attention to Student A as distinct, for example, from referring Student A to staff within the School qualified and employed to deal with such matters of concern. The panel noted that Mr Nicholson was a physics teacher, not a DSL or DDSL, and that systems were in place in every school to deal with pastoral issues of concern regarding students.

The panel found that it had been proven to the standard of the balance of probabilities that Mr Nicholson had, in the period between September 2014 and September 2018, engaged in and/or developed an inappropriate relationship with Student A by spending excessive one-on-one time with Student A at the School when he did not have good reason to do so.

The panel found allegation 1(b) proved.

c. engaging in inappropriate physical contact with Student A by:

i. holding Student A's hand

ii. cuddling Student A;

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson admitted these allegations as set out in his undated written statement. Notwithstanding this, the panel made determinations based on the evidence available to it.

The panel considered a document setting out messages between Student A and Mr Nicholson on Google Hangouts between August 2016 and June 2020. The panel noted a message on 24 March 2017 where Student A stated, [REDACTED]. The panel noted that Mr Nicholson responded stating "*If I hug or cuddle someone for too long I start to feel a bit uncomfortable*".

The panel noted that they had seen a number of messages containing emojis between Mr Nicholson and Student A with two people holding hands which, according to Student A's evidence, had been the symbol they used between them to signify cuddling.

The panel considered the oral evidence and written statement of Student A, who provided that, in or around January 2016, her and Mr Nicholson started to become more tactile and he wanted her to hug him. She stated that she hated people touching her [REDACTED] but he did not take no for an answer. She stated that he would put his hand in hers and say things like look how much bigger my hand is and he would sit next to her and be so close that their bodies were touching. Student A stated that when they used to sit and eat lunch initially they used to just talk but it quickly became tactile and she would sit on his lap facing towards him with her legs wrapped round him and that on lots of occasions they would press their faces together and put their noses together and

that they would hold hands and cuddle. She stated it would happen very regularly and that it felt like they were meeting up at lunch to be physical and not talk.

In oral evidence Student A was clear that it was Mr Nicholson who first initiated physical contact and that he had initially done this through giving her a 'thank you' hug following on from a gift she or her parents had given him in recognition of his work as her teacher.

The panel considered the written statement of Mr Nicholson, who admitted that he held Student A's hand on occasions when she was distressed or seeking reassurance, and that this occurred during one-to-one meetings at the School. He stated that he regarded the contact as a gesture of comfort in response to Student A [REDACTED].

Mr Nicholson admitted that he hugged Student A on multiple occasions during one-to-one meetings at school. He stated that the first occasion occurred after a private meeting at which Student A had [REDACTED] and then directly asked for a hug. The panel noted that Mr Nicholson stated that although he felt uncomfortable with the request and later sought to avoid similar situations, he continued to comply when Student A requested hugs during subsequent meetings, because she would explain that physical reassurance was the "*only thing*" that made her feel better. Mr Nicholson stated that he viewed the contact as a gesture of comfort and reassurance rather than anything romantic or sexual in nature.

The panel considered that it was proven to the standard of the balance of probabilities that between September 2014 and September 2018 Mr Nicholson engaged in and/or developed an inappropriate relationship with Student A by engaging in inappropriate physical contact with her by holding her hand and cuddling her. The panel took into account that Mr Nicholson admitted this and Student A's detailed evidence.

Having considered the admitted facts and the supporting evidence, the panel found allegations 1(c)(i) and 1(c)(ii) proved.

iii. touching the top of Student A's thigh near her groin;

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson denied this allegation as set out in his undated written statement.

The panel considered the oral evidence and written statement of Student A, who stated that she could not recall the precise date but at some point in 2016, before she went on [REDACTED], she went to see Mr Nicholson in his classroom at 7am before school started. She stated she was sat next to him and he touched the top of her thigh near her groin area and it made her feel uncomfortable.

The panel considered the written statement of Mr Nicholson, who stated that he had no recollection of any such contact, although it was possible that he may have placed a reassuring hand on her leg at some point and that this had subsequently been

misremembered or misinterpreted. He stated that Student A had told the police that no intimate or sexual contact had occurred between them and suggested that had he touched her in the way suggested by this allegation this would have been mentioned to the police as intimate contact.

The panel considered the evidence which it had before it. The panel noted that Mr Nicholson's denial was, at best, equivocal including that he indicated that he may have *"placed a reassuring hand on her leg"*. The panel noted the live and written evidence of Student A as to what happened and considered that it was more likely than not that in 2016, at some point, Mr Nicholson engaged in and/or developed an inappropriate relationship with Student A by touching the top of Student A's thigh near her groin.

The panel found allegation 1(c)(iii) proved.

iv. having Student A sit on your knee;

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson admitted this allegation as set out in his undated written statement. Notwithstanding this, the panel made a determination based on the evidence available to it.

The panel considered the oral evidence and written statement of Student A, who stated that from January 2016 onwards she regularly met with Mr Nicholson before School and [REDACTED]. She stated that, at first, they used to just sit and eat lunch and talk but it quickly became tactile and she would sit on his lap facing inwards towards him with her knees wrapped around him. During her oral evidence Student A confirmed that she would frequently sit on him in this fashion and described different locations at which this would occur. Student A also recalled that whilst she was revising for her exams in 2016 she and Mr Nicholson would attend the School at weekends and they would cuddle and she would sit on his lap.

The panel considered the written statement of Mr Nicholson, who stated that he recalled only one occasion when Student A sat on his knee during a meeting in a music classroom after she had asked to speak with him about a matter that had upset her. He stated that the contact was uninvited and that he felt uncomfortable. He stated that he stood up, encouraged Student A to sit on a chair instead, and moved to another chair nearby. He maintained that he did not encourage or consent to the contact.

The panel considered the evidence which it had before it. The panel noted that Mr Nicholson appeared to admit this allegation, at least in respect of one occasion, although noted that Student A's evidence was that it happened on a large number of occasions.

The panel noted the oral and written evidence of Student A as to what happened and considered that it was more likely than not that in 2016 at some point Mr Nicholson

engaged in and/or developed an inappropriate relationship with Student A by having her sit on his knee.

Having considered the admitted facts and the supporting evidence, the panel found allegation 1(c)(iv) proved.

v. lying on top of Student A;

vi. stroking Student A's face with your hand;

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson denied these allegations as set out in his undated written statement.

The panel considered the oral evidence and written statement of Student A, who stated that [REDACTED] in 2016 she was poorly and went into the meeting room in the morning to meet with Mr Nicholson. She stated she was dizzy and lay down across some chairs and he lay on top of her and stroked her face and wiped away her tears.

The panel considered the written statement of Mr Nicholson, who stated that he did not recall lying on top of Student A at any point. He further stated that the only occasion he recalled Student A lying on the floor, [REDACTED] and he sat on the floor next to her "*providing support*". Mr Nicholson stated that he had no recollection of stroking Student A's face, but accepted that, on occasions when Student A was upset and crying during meetings, he may have wiped tears from her face as a gesture of comfort and reassurance.

The panel noted that in order to find allegation 1(c)(v) proven it would have to conclude that Mr Nicholson lay on top of student A rather than beside her.

The panel noted that Student A appeared, in oral evidence to have limited recollection of this event, also noting her evidence that she was poorly and dizzy at the time, and the panel queried the practicalities of Mr Nicholson having lain on top of her whilst stroking her face.

Although the panel concluded it was more likely than not that an event akin to that which Student A had described occurred on the date of her [REDACTED] in 2016 the panel did not consider it was proven to the requisite standard, given the uncertainty in the evidence put forward, that Mr Nicholson had, in fact, been lying on top of her as opposed to, for example, beside her. The panel did though consider that it was proven that it was more likely than not that Mr Nicholson had stroked Student A's face with his hand and noted that he admitted the possibility of this.

The panel considered that it was more likely than not that in 2016 Mr Nicholson engaged in and/or developed an inappropriate relationship with Student A by stroking her face with his hand.

The panel found allegation 1(c)(v) not proved and allegation 1(c)(vi) proved.

vii. grabbing Student A by the arm and dragging them out from the cupboard within a classroom.

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson denied this allegation as set out in his undated written statement.

The panel had regard to a photo of Student A's arm showing some bruising, which she stated was due to Mr Nicholson grabbing her arm and dragging her out of the cupboard at the back of his classroom.

The panel considered the oral evidence and written statement of Student A, who stated that she was in the cupboard in his classroom during year 12 and recalled one specific instance where he physically grabbed her arm and dragged her out of the cupboard. She stated that she was [REDACTED] in the room with him and started to pass out so he grabbed her as he wanted to get her out of the room, dragged her out of the room and laid her on the floor. She stated she had bruises from his fingers on her arm from this and had taken a photograph of them. The panel noted the content of Student A's interview with the police was consistent with her written and oral evidence to the TRA.

The panel considered the written statement of Mr Nicholson, who stated that this allegation related to an incident in which Student A appeared to be [REDACTED] in a preparation room adjoining his classroom. He stated that, after initially supporting her in the room, he assisted her in moving back into the classroom once she felt able to do so. As Student A said she was having difficulty walking and was stumbling, he stated that he held her arm to support her while moving between the rooms. He denied grabbing or dragging her and maintained that the contact was to assist her during a period of distress only.

The panel carefully considered and balanced the evidence before it and concluded, accepting Student A's evidence, that it was more likely than not that events had occurred as Student A had described, noting her clear evidence and the apparent evidence of bruising.

The panel considered that it was evidenced on the balance of probabilities that between September 2014 and September 2018 Mr Nicholson engaged in and/or developed an inappropriate relationship with Student A by grabbing Student A by the arm and dragging her out of the cupboard within a classroom.

The panel found allegation 1(c)(vii) proved.

viii. allowing Student A to:

1. place their hand on your upper thigh and/or groin

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson denied this allegation as set out in his undated written statement.

The panel considered the oral evidence and written statement of Student A, who stated that she recalled one occasion in 2016 in the meeting room where she touched his thigh close to his penis and he said, *"you're a bit close there"*. She stated that she messaged him afterwards to say sorry and he said words to the effect of that he was happy for her to do it again and it was nice and comforted him.

The panel considered the written statement of Mr Nicholson, who stated that on one occasion Student A placed her hand on his leg during a meeting in a private meeting room. He stated that the contact was unsolicited, made him uncomfortable because of how high up his leg her hand was placed, and that he immediately asked her to remove it, which she did. The panel noted that he denied allowing or encouraging the contact.

The panel carefully considered the evidence in front of it. The panel considered that in the context of the clearly inappropriate and tactile relationship which it had found Mr Nicholson had permitted, it was entirely plausible that Student A had placed her hand on Mr Nicholson's upper thigh, and the panel did not call into question Student A's evidence in that regard, which it noted, at least to that extent, was accepted by Mr Nicholson.

The panel noted though that in order to find this allegation proven it would be required to conclude that Mr Nicholson 'allowed' Student A to take this action. The panel did not consider that, with that caveat, it was able to find this allegation proven on the evidence.

The panel therefore found allegation 1(c)(viii)(1) not proved.

2. kiss you.

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson denied this allegation as set out in his undated written statement.

The panel had regard to screenshots of message conversations between Student A and Mr Nicholson on 14 June 2017, in which Student A asked, [REDACTED]. The panel noted that Mr Nicholson commented *"up to you I guess"*.

The panel considered the oral evidence and written statement of Student A, who stated that on one occasion in [REDACTED] whilst meeting up in the music room where they met quite frequently during sixth form she was sat on his lap, as they would usually do in other rooms. She stated that as she was sat on his lap facing him and he leaned forward towards her face so they were inches apart and she took that to mean that he was going to kiss her, as he was leaning in, so she kissed him on the lips. She stated that she did not push forward to kiss him as he had leaned in first and then she kissed him. She stated that as they pulled apart Mr Nicholson appeared panicked, but they stood cuddling for some time afterwards and [REDACTED].

The panel considered the written statement of Mr Nicholson, who denied allowing Student A to kiss him. He stated that, after moving away from physical contact initiated by Student A, she unexpectedly hugged and kissed him. He further stated that he immediately pushed her away, moved to the other side of the room, and asked her to leave. Mr Nicholson disputed the wording of the allegation that he “*allowed*” this kiss as he stated that this was an isolated incident that occurred without his consent or encouragement, and that he made clear through his reaction that the contact was unwanted and he did not believe that any subsequent hug occurred.

The panel again carefully considered the evidence which it had before it, noting that again it would have to conclude that Mr Nicholson ‘allowed’ Student A to kiss him if it were to find this allegation proved. The panel again noted the clearly established inappropriate and tactile relationship which it had found proven existed between them. The panel noted Student A’s evidence that Mr Nicholson had leaned forward to kiss her whilst she was sitting on his lap facing him and concluded that they must have been close enough for this to have occurred, and that Mr Nicholson must reasonably have been aware both of the possibility of this and of the inappropriateness of their proximity. In all the circumstances given his actions, including his allowing the circumstances and proximity in which an event of this nature could occur and Student A’s reporting of his leaning in towards her, the panel was satisfied, on the balance of probabilities, that Mr Nicholson had allowed Student A to kiss him.

The panel considered that it was evidenced on the balance of probabilities that between September 2014 and September 2018 Mr Nicholson engaged in and/or developed an inappropriate relationship with Student A by allowing Student A to kiss him.

The panel found allegation 1(c)(viii)(2) proved.

d. giving one or more gifts to Student A as set out in Schedule 1.

[REDACTED]

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson admitted this allegation in full as set out in his undated written statement and within the e-mail of 22 July 2026 which the panel had been referred to as part of the supporting documentation for the TRA’s preliminary application to proceed in Mr Nicholson’s absence. Notwithstanding this, the panel made a determination based on the evidence available to it.

The panel considered various photographic exhibits including a photograph of a cuddly dolphin, a green plaited bracelet with beads, an oval coin embossed with “*My Lucky Penny*” and a large conch shell.

The panel considered the oral evidence and written statement of Student A, who stated that in September 2015, [REDACTED], Mr Nicholson gave her her first present which

was a mindfulness colouring book. He stated that it was to help her with exam stress. She stated that he started buying her more gifts in 2016 including a dolphin for her 16th birthday which he told her she could cuddle when he was not around. She stated she recalled that at some point later in 2016 he bought her a copy of his favourite book and gave her two of his bracelets which he told her to wear [REDACTED]. She stated one bracelet was a chunky leather one and the other one was a green beaded one. She stated he also gifted her his lucky penny and bought her a conch shell as well as a music book [REDACTED].

The panel considered the written statement of Mr Nicholson, who accepted that he gave Student A the gifts listed in Schedule 1. He stated that some were intended to [REDACTED] help manage exam-related stress, while others were small tokens intended to provide happiness during difficult periods. He also stated that, on occasion, he gave gifts in response to gifts that Student A had given to him, as he was concerned that a failure to reciprocate might upset her. He accepted that the exchange of gifts was inappropriate and reflected a failure to maintain proper professional boundaries.

The panel considered that it was evidenced on the balance of probabilities that between September 2014 and September 2018 Mr Nicholson engaged in and/or developed an inappropriate relationship with Student A by giving gifts to Student A as set out in Schedule 1.

The panel found allegation 1(d) proved.

e. on one or more occasions locking you and Student A alone inside a meeting room at the School.

The panel considered the oral evidence and written statement of Student A, who stated that after initially meeting Mr Nicholson [REDACTED] at School within his classroom, he suggested they move to a space where no one could see them so they moved to one of the academy's meeting rooms. She set out that only staff and sixth formers were allowed down the corridor to access the meeting room so Mr Nicholson would come to collect her and take her to the meeting room. She stated that the door was opened by a code which she was not allowed to have but Mr Nicholson gave her the code.

She stated that he would lock the door when they were inside and she did not know how to open the door once it was locked from the inside. She stated that the meeting room was very small like a cupboard. During oral evidence Student A explained that there was a mechanism on the inside of the door when it closed and that she had no idea how to work it or unlock it.

The panel considered the written statement of Mr Nicholson, who denied that he locked himself and Student A alone inside a meeting room. He stated that meeting rooms at the school were fitted with doors that automatically locked from the outside when closed but

could always be opened from the inside. He stated he would typically be sat down at the table facing the door when Student A arrived and she would close the door behind him before sitting down opposite him.

The panel considered the evidence in front of it. It noted that Mr Nicholson did not appear to deny that the door was locked when he and Student A had met in the meeting room, stating simply that these doors could still be opened from the inside. It appeared that the doors were locked and that Student A, at least, had a clear impression that not just were they locked but she had no ability to open them.

The panel considered that it was evidenced on the balance of probabilities that between September 2014 and September 2018 Mr Nicholson engaged in and/or developed an inappropriate relationship with Student A by, on one or more occasions, locking himself and Student A alone inside a meeting room at the School.

The panel found allegation 1(e) proved.

f. on one or more occasions hiding Student A inside a cupboard within a classroom at the School.

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson denied this allegation as set out in his undated written statement.

The panel considered the oral evidence and written statement of Student A, who stated that when she started sixth form she and Mr Nicholson still met up one to one every day and that Mr Nicholson had moved classrooms to the new science block. She stated that in this classroom there was a cupboard at the back for storage of science equipment which had a lock on. She stated that Mr Nicholson put a single desk in there next to the shelving racks and set it up for her. She recalled that he stated to her that this was her space and she was often locked in there during his lessons when he was teaching younger year groups. She stated that as she could not leave whilst he was teaching she was left in there for long periods of time. She stated that between lessons Mr Nicholson would come and visit her in there and they would lie together on the floor and cuddle in the far left corner of the room. The panel recalled Student A's previous evidence that she had been in this cupboard when Mr Nicholson had physically grabbed her arm and dragged her out on one occasion, as the panel had found proven.

During oral evidence Student A confirmed that Mr Nicholson would hide her in this room stating that although the room had two doors the other one was not capable of being opened, as she understood it.

The panel considered the written statement of Mr Nicholson, who denied hiding Student A in a cupboard. He explained that the area in question was a science preparation and storage room attached to a laboratory, which had doors both into the classroom and onto

the corridor. He stated that, while in sixth form, Student A asked for a quiet place to study because she found the common room distracting, and he suggested that she could use the preparation room for independent study. He submitted that her use of the room was voluntary, that she was free to leave at any time, and that he did not require or encourage her to remain there. He stated that he may have asked her to use the corridor door rather than enter the classroom during lessons for practical reasons, but stated that the room remained accessible and was regularly used by science technicians for its normal purpose.

The panel noted the incredibly unusual nature of the arrangement which was demonstrably, on any analysis, even the facts as provided by Mr Nicholson, highly inappropriate. The panel carefully considered the evidence and, accepting Student A's evidence and the nature of the set up generally, found it proven that Mr Nicholson had hidden her in the room on one or more occasions.

The panel concluded that it had been proven to the standard of the balance of probabilities, that between September 2014 and September 2018 Mr Nicholson engaged in and/or developed an inappropriate relationship with Student A by, on one or more occasions, hiding Student A inside a cupboard within a classroom at the School.

The panel found allegation 1(f) proved.

2. Your conduct as described at paragraphs 1.c.vii and/or 1.e. and/or 1.f. was dishonest and/or displayed a lack of integrity in that you intended to conceal your relationship with Student A from others.

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson denied this allegation as set out in his undated written statement. The panel noted that it had found each of allegations 1(c)(vii), 1(e) and 1(f) proven.

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

The panel firstly sought to ascertain the actual state of Mr Nicholson's knowledge or belief as to the facts.

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson denied that his conduct was intended to conceal his relationship with Student A. In relation to the incident described at allegation 1(c)(vii) Mr Nicholson stated that his actions were motivated by concerns for Student A's wellbeing rather than any desire for secrecy.

In relation to the meetings described in allegations 1(f) Mr Nicholson stated that he admittedly facilitated a place for Student A to study but that had never insisted that she remain there.

In relation to allegation 1(e) Mr Nicholson stated that part of the discomfort he felt with meeting in the meeting rooms was they were small, compact and private and it made it easier for Student A to request a hug and he sought to attempt to mitigate this by prearranging the room. He stated that he had a constant anxiety that one of these hugs would be seen and his preference was to prevent them from occurring rather than conceal them but they occurred multiple times. He stated that by leaving the door latch closed he ensured that if Student A did ask for a hug it would not be seen, so this did ensure that this remained concealed.

The panel noted that by the wording of the allegations which it had found proven it had concluded that by his actions Mr Nicholson had deliberately hidden Student A within the cupboard in his classroom. The panel noted that even in his defence Mr Nicholson admitted that in their meetings he wished to minimise the chance of any physical contact being seen. The panel noted that Mr Nicholson repeatedly acknowledged that he should have escalated concerns about his and about Student A's behaviour but that he did not do so. The panel was satisfied that in taking the actions which it had found Mr Nicholson did take, as proven within the three allegations which it was considering here, Mr Nicholson would have been aware that he was acting to cover up his inappropriate actions and therefore he would have been aware that his actions were dishonest.

The panel then went on to consider whether Mr Nicholson's conduct was dishonest by the standards of ordinary decent people.

The panel was satisfied that any member of the public properly informed would be rightly appalled that a teacher, with all the duties of care which teachers owe towards children, would take steps to repeatedly arrange and/or facilitate and conceal private meetings between that teacher and a child at which physical contact repeatedly occurred. The panel considered that the public would certainly consider that behaviour which was concerned with the concealment of a clearly inappropriate relationship between a teacher and a pupil, such as the behaviour set out in these three allegations, was entirely inappropriate, unacceptable and dishonest.

The panel then went on to consider whether Mr Nicholson had failed to act with integrity. The panel considered the case of *Wingate & Anor v The Solicitors Regulation Authority*, which describes integrity as the “*higher standards which society expects from professional persons*”.

The panel was mindful that professionals are not expected to be “*paragons of virtue*”, but they are expected to act in accordance with the ethical and behavioural standards that underpin their professional role.

The panel considered it clear that Mr Nicholson's actions under these three allegations, which it had already found were dishonest, were in manifest breach of professional boundaries and clearly breached the high standards expected of the profession.

The panel found allegation 2 proved.

3. On one or more occasions during April 2017 and/or August 2017 you failed to act appropriately and/or ensure appropriate action was taken to safeguard Student A [REDACTED].

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson admitted this allegation as set out in his undated written statement. Notwithstanding this, the panel made a determination based on the evidence available to it.

[REDACTED]

The panel found allegation 3 proved.

4. On one or more occasions between September 2016 and August 2018 you said to Student A words to the effect that, if your relationship with Student A was revealed to others you:

- a. would “drive [your] car off the road”;**
- b. “had a suicide note in [your] drawer”.**

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson appeared to admit these allegations in his response to the notice of referral but contextualised that admission in his subsequent written statement. The panel made a determination based on the evidence available to it.

The panel considered the oral evidence and written statement of Student A, who stated that, on the same day she had kissed Mr Nicholson, he had messaged her when he was driving home saying he was worried he would lose his job. She said that she told him that she would not report him to the police but that he did need to leave his job as it was wrong for him to be a teacher.

She stated that he told her he could not quit as he was in debt and could not afford to leave. Student A said that from this point onwards he mentioned being in debt and expressed [REDACTED] whenever she proposed reporting him. Student A stated that he blackmailed her by insinuating that [REDACTED] in his bedside drawer. Student A said that when she did eventually report it to the police her principal worry was that he would [REDACTED].

The panel considered the written statement of Mr Nicholson, who stated that he believed allegation 4(a) related to an isolated conversation in 2022 or early 2023 rather than between 2016 and 2018. He stated that, while driving to calm down, he may have used words to the effect that he would “*drive [his] car off the road*” when speaking to Student A over the phone. He stated that the comment was an expression of frustration and

hopelessness rather than a genuine threat or intention and arose after repeated calls from Student A which he had ignored.

Mr Nicholson also denied telling Student A that he had a “*suicide note*” in a drawer. He stated that, since his mid-20s, he had maintained a note containing messages to loved ones and practical information in the event of his unexpected death, [REDACTED]. He stated that he must have mentioned the note to Student A, but stated that he did not regard it as a suicide note and did not believe he had described it in those terms.

The panel also carefully again considered the messages which had passed between Student A and Mr Nicholson at this time noting references to the effect that he was [REDACTED].

Having considered the admitted facts and the supporting evidence, the panel preferred Student A’s account, including in relation to the time at which these statements were made, and found this plausible including given the nature of the communication between them at that time within the messages.

The panel found allegation 4(b) proved.

5. Your conduct as described at paragraph 4 above was dishonest and/or displayed a lack of integrity in that you intended to pressure Student A not to reveal his relationship with Student A to others.

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson denied this allegation as set out in his undated written statement.

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

The panel firstly sought to ascertain the actual state of Mr Nicholson's knowledge or belief as to the facts.

The panel considered the written statement of Mr Nicholson, who denied that he ever made any demand that Student A not discuss or reveal anything about the nature of their relationship and also stated that he was aware of the consequences were that to happen. He indicated that he felt trapped by the situation, struggling with the intensity and unpredictability of the communications with Student A, and believing that disclosure should occur on her terms because of concerns about the effect it might have on her wellbeing. He stated that all he thought he could do was continue to support Student A in the hope that was at least having some positive impact.

The panel noted that it had found allegation 4 proven and that pursuant to the facts it had found proven by virtue of finding that allegation proven, it appeared clear that Mr Nicholson was continuing to take steps to conceal the nature of his and Student A's

relationship. The panel noted that contrary to Mr Nicholson's evidence in respect of this allegation there appeared to be extensive evidence within the messages which it had identified between him and Student A where he was requesting that she not tell others about their contact.

The panel was then satisfied that Mr Nicholson, in making such extreme threats regarding his actions as it had found he had, to an individual he was well aware had extremely strong feelings towards him and whom he acknowledged to be [REDACTED], could have had only one purpose, to pressurise Student A not to reveal his relationship with Student A to others.

The panel was satisfied that Mr Nicholson would be aware that his actions in continuing to seek to conceal his misconduct in those terms (or at all) were clearly dishonest.

The panel went on to consider whether Mr Nicholson's conduct was dishonest by the standards of ordinary decent people. The panel had no doubt that seeking to conceal a longstanding inappropriate relationship with a child [REDACTED] if she did so would be considered dishonest by the standards of ordinary decent people.

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

The panel was mindful that professionals are not expected to be "*paragons of virtue*", but they are expected to act in accordance with the ethical and behavioural standards that underpin their professional role.

The panel was satisfied that Mr Nicholson, [REDACTED], was acting entirely without the integrity the profession required.

The panel found allegation 5 proved.

6. On one or more occasions between September 2021 and September 2023, you invited and/or allowed Student A into your home.

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson admitted this allegation as set out in his response to the notice of referral dated 4 February 2026.

The panel considered the notes of an investigation meeting with Mr Nicholson conducted by the School on 28 March 2024. The panel noted that Mr Nicholson was asked about Student A visiting his home when she was aged around [REDACTED]. Mr Nicholson responded stating that Student A had asked him over four to five months for his address, then confessed that she had known it all along. She then called and told him that she was coming to his house, and, despite Mr Nicholson asking her not to, she did. He further

stated that on another occasion Student A had arrived at his house unannounced, upset about her boyfriend.

The panel considered the oral evidence and written statement of Student A, who stated that she had visited Mr Nicholson at his house three times since leaving school. She said the first time was in 2021, during [REDACTED] university, and that Mr Nicholson was in a bad state and was crying and she was worried about him. She stated that Mr Nicholson told her to come inside his house as he did not want to talk on the doorstep. She stated she did not want to but he insisted she came inside so she went into his house. She stated that the second time she went to his house was around August 2022 and she went to him for comfort and they sat on the sofa together and spoke in his living room. She stated the third time she went to his house was around September 2022 and that she was there for about an hour and they caught up and chatted.

The panel considered that, on the evidence it had, it was proven that on one or more occasion between September 2021 and September 2023 Mr Nicholson invited and/or allowed Student A into his home.

The panel found allegation 6 proved.

7. Your conduct as described at paragraph 1 above

a. breached professional boundaries;

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson admitted this allegation as set out in his undated written statement. Notwithstanding this, the panel made a determination based on the evidence available to it.

The panel considered the written statement of Mr Nicholson, who acknowledged that he knowingly departed from school policies and accepted safeguarding practices, failed to follow safeguarding procedures, and allowed his relationship with Student A to develop into a close friendship that was inappropriate in a teacher-pupil context. He stated that, although his intention had been to provide support and reassurance, this did not excuse his significant errors of judgement or diminish the negative impact of his actions on Student A.

The panel carefully considered what it had found proven under allegation 1. The panel noted that it had found proven that Mr Nicholson had engaged in and developed an inappropriate relationship with Student A including in extensive inappropriate communication with her which was, in places, of a sexual nature. Within that communication it had found he encouraged her to take recreational drugs and masturbate. It had also found he engaged in inappropriate physical contact with Student A including in holding her hand, cuddling her, having her sit on his knee, stroking her

face, grabbing her by the arm and dragging her out of a cupboard and allowing her to kiss him.

It had also found that he had given her a number of gifts and had hidden her inside a store cupboard and locked her in a room with the intention of concealing their inappropriate relationship.

The panel had no doubt whatsoever that such actions were in fundamental breach of the professional boundaries between a teacher and a child and in particular breached the absolutely core requirements of safeguarding and acting in the child's best interests and pursuing a child centred approach.

Having considered the admitted facts and the supporting evidence, the panel found allegation 7(a) proved.

b. was sexually motivated.

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson denied this allegation as set out in his undated written statement.

The panel considered whether the conduct was sexually motivated. It noted that in *Basson* it was stated that, “*A sexual motive means that the conduct was done either in pursuit of sexual gratification or in pursuit of a sexual relationship*”.

The panel was also mindful of the Court of Appeal’s conclusion in *General Medical Council v Haris [2021] EWCA Civ 763*. The court found in that case that, “*In the absence of a plausible innocent explanation for what he did, the facts spoke for themselves*”.

The panel considered whether there was a “*plausible innocent explanation*” for Mr Nicholson’s behaviour.

The panel considered the undated written statement of Mr Nicholson, who denied that his conduct towards Student A was sexually motivated or driven by any form of personal gain. He stated that, [REDACTED] he made clear that [REDACTED] no relationship would develop. He further stated that he [REDACTED] consistently declined her requests to meet in person. While he accepted that he crossed professional boundaries and exercised poor judgement in his communications with Student A, he stated that his actions were not motivated by a desire for a sexual relationship or sexual gratification.

The panel had regard to the extensive correspondence between Student A and Mr Nicholson on the Google Hangouts platform, and noted that many of the messages related to either innuendo or were of an explicitly sexual nature. Whilst noting that on a number of occasions it appeared that Student A initiated these conversations, the panel considered that Mr Nicholson frequently encouraged the direction of the conversation and continued the extensive correspondence on many different sexual subjects. Mr

Nicholson appeared in a large amount of the correspondence to be tutoring Student A on sex and sexuality. Mr Nicholson talked to her about masturbation, penis size, [REDACTED], sex, oral sex and various sexual positions and his sexual activities [REDACTED].

[REDACTED] The panel also noted the extensive physical contact which had occurred between the two of them in sometimes locked and private locations within the School as well as the occasions of Student A sitting on his knee and holding his hand and his allowing her to kiss him.

The panel considered Mr Nicholson would have been well aware that just a tiny fraction of the correspondence and actions of his which it had found proven under allegation 1 would have being entirely inappropriate and represented an extremely intimate relationship with a child which no teacher should have had, let alone pursued for a number of years. The panel was satisfied that Mr Nicholson would clearly have been aware of the impact his actions and his intimate companionship would have on an impressionable teenager, indeed he wrote to her about the nature of teenage life. Also, in any event, [REDACTED] Mr Nicholson, including by continuing to engage in the communication over the course of years, undoubtedly perpetuated those feelings. The panel rejected the idea that Mr Nicholson could plausibly have conceived that his actions in continuing the relationship were exclusively supportive.

Absent any plausible alternative explanation whatsoever for his extensive prolonged physical and incredibly close emotional contact, frequently of a sexual nature, with a [REDACTED] teenage girl in the terms found proven in allegation 1, and given the proven nature of his actions concerning her, the panel concluded that it had been demonstrated, on the balance of probabilities, that Mr Nicholson's conduct as described in allegation 1 was done either in pursuit of sexual gratification or in pursuit of a sexual relationship and was therefore sexually motivated.

Having considered the admitted facts and the supporting evidence, the panel found allegation 7(b) proved.

You have been convicted of a relevant offence, namely:

8. On 12 April 2024 at Sheffield Magistrates' Court, you were convicted of:

- a. **possession of a controlled drug of class A, namely cocaine, contrary to Section 5(1) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.**
- b. **possession of a controlled drug of class A, namely methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA), contrary to Section 5(1) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.**

- c. **possession of a controlled drug of class B, namely cannabis, contrary to Section 5(1) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.**
- d. **possession of a controlled drug of class C, namely Etizolam, Diazepam, contrary to Section 5(1) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.**

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson admitted the facts of allegations 8(a), (b), (c) and (d) as set out in his undated written statement.

The panel noted page 8 of the document Teacher misconduct: The prohibition of teachers ('the Advice'), which states that where there has been a conviction, at any time, of a criminal offence, the panel will accept the certificate of conviction as conclusive proof of both the conviction and the facts necessarily implied by the conviction unless exceptional circumstances apply. The panel did not find any exceptional circumstances applicable in this case.

The panel had been provided with a certificate of conviction from Sheffield Magistrates' Court which detailed that on 12 April 2024, Mr Nicholson pleaded guilty to and was convicted of the offences of "*possess a controlled drug of Class B – Cannabis / Cannabis Resin*"; "*possess a controlled drug of class A – Cocaine*"; "*possess a class C controlled drug*"; and "*possess a controlled drug of Class A – MDMA*".

Mr Nicholson was sentenced in respect of the allegations to a fine of £250 and an order that the substances be forfeited and destroyed. He was ordered to pay a surcharge to fund victim services of £400, and to pay costs of £85 to the Crown Prosecution Service.

Having considered the admitted facts and the supporting evidence, including the certificate of conviction, the panel found allegations 8(a), (b), (c) and (d) proved.

Findings as to unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute and/or conviction of a relevant offence

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 and/or conviction of a relevant offence.

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 Nicholson in relation to the facts found proved, involved breaches of the Teachers' Standards.

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

- Teachers uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school, by
 - treating pupils with dignity, building relationships rooted in mutual respect, and at all times observing proper boundaries appropriate to a teacher's professional position
 - having regard for the need to safeguard pupils' well-being, in accordance with statutory provisions
- 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 Nicholson, in relation to the facts found proved, involved breaches of Keeping Children Safe In Education ('KCSIE').

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

KCSIE 2014 paragraphs 3, 6, 8, 17 and 18.

KCSIE 2015 paragraphs 6, 8, 12, 17 and 18.

KCSIE 2016 paragraphs 2, 3, 6, 7, 10, 17, 21 and 28.

The panel also considered whether Mr Nicholson's conduct displayed behaviours associated with any of the offence types listed on pages 12 and 13 of the Advice.

The Advice indicates that where behaviours associated with such an offence exist, a panel is likely to conclude that an individual's conduct would amount to unacceptable professional conduct.

The panel found that the offence types of sexual activity and sexual communication with a child and controlling and coercive behaviour were relevant.

The panel noted that, whilst some of the aspects of the allegations could be said to have taken place outside the education setting, the panel considered that the conduct affected the way Mr Nicholson fulfilled his teaching role and may have led to pupils being exposed to, or influenced by, the behaviour in a harmful way insofar as he was carrying out a wholly inappropriate and sexually motivated relationship with a child.

The panel carefully considered again the conduct that it had found proven. The panel had found proven that Mr Nicholson had engaged over a prolonged period in a wholly inappropriate relationship with a child whom he taught who was [REDACTED] at the time

when the relationship commenced. Mr Nicholson had engaged in a long term and detailed and sexually motivated communication with this child and had extensive physical contact with her. Student A's evidence was that he was, at its height, entirely the controlling influence in her life more than her parents or any other person and the nature and extent of the correspondence appeared to the panel to illustrate that assertion. The panel had found that Mr Nicholson's actions breached professional boundaries. The panel noted that Mr Nicholson had innumerable opportunities to escalate his actions and the actions of Student A via the appropriate safeguarding channels or to senior management and had wholly failed to do so at any time, then or since. Mr Nicholson's actions had very clearly, and as he now admitted, had a devastating effect upon Student A at a vital time in her development.

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

In relation to whether Mr Nicholson'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 Nicholson's conduct displayed behaviours associated with any of the offence types in the list that begins on page 12 of the Advice.

As set out above in the panel's findings as to whether Mr Nicholson was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct, the panel found the offence types of sexual activity and sexual communication with a child and controlling and coercive behaviour to be relevant.

The panel again reminded itself that it had found proven that Mr Nicholson had engaged in a sexually motivated relationship with a child over the course of a number of years including in extensive communication with her including in relation to matters of a sexual nature as well as his engaging in physical contact with her on a number of occasions and his failing to report any of the myriad of safeguarding issues which arose on a continuing basis during their long relationship during Student A's time in years [REDACTED]. The panel considered that Mr Nicholson's actions were extremely serious and had clearly had extremely serious consequences for the child concerned.

The panel considered that the findings of misconduct were serious, and the conduct displayed would be likely to have a negative impact on the public's perception of Mr Nicholson as a teacher and on the teaching profession generally.

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

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

Having found allegation 8 proved, the panel also went on to consider whether the facts of that proved allegation amounted to conviction of a relevant offence.

The panel found that Mr Nicholson's actions were relevant to teaching, working with children and working in an education setting in that he was found to be in possession of illegal drugs. The panel noted that the behaviour involved in committing the offence could have had an impact on the safety and/or security of pupils and/or members of the public.

The panel also took account of the way the teaching profession is viewed by others. The panel considered that Mr Nicholson's behaviour in committing the offence could affect public confidence in the teaching profession, given the influence that teachers may have on pupils, parents and others in the community.

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson's behaviour did not lead to a sentence of imprisonment, which was indicative that the offence was at the less serious end of the possible spectrum.

The panel also considered the offences listed on pages 12 and 13 of the Advice.

This was a case concerning an offence involving possession, supply or production of class A drugs which the Advice states is likely to be considered a relevant offence.

The panel noted the undated written statement of Mr Nicholson, who accepted that the substances found at his home were in his possession and had been purchased for his personal use. He stated that his drug use had been infrequent and largely confined to music festivals, and that he had never attended work under the influence of drugs or alcohol, nor worked when there was any risk of lingering effects. Mr Nicholson stated that the substances had been stored for a considerable period and were remnants from previous occasions of use, rather than evidence of regular consumption. Whilst acknowledging that possession of the substances was a criminal offence and had the potential to cause reputational damage to his employer and the profession, Mr Nicholson stated that his drug use had never affected his conduct, judgement or performance at work.

The panel, after careful consideration, found that the seriousness of the offending behaviour that led to the convictions was relevant to Mr Nicholson's ongoing suitability to teach. The panel considered that a finding that these convictions were for relevant offences was necessary to reaffirm clear standards of conduct so as to maintain public confidence in the teaching profession.

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, and conviction of a relevant offence, 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 protection of other members of the public; the maintenance of public confidence in the profession and the declaring and upholding proper standards of conduct.

In light of the panel's findings against Mr Nicholson, which involved extensive sexually motivated and inappropriate communications with a child over a prolonged period, there was a strong public interest consideration engaged 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 Mr Nicholson 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 Nicholson 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 Nicholson in the profession. The panel was not presented with any evidence that Mr Nicholson had substantial ability as an educator, and the panel considered that the adverse public interest considerations above outweighed any interest in retaining Mr Nicholson in the profession, since his

behaviour fundamentally breached the standard of conduct expected of a teacher, and he sought to exploit his position of trust.

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 noted that a teacher's behaviour that seeks to exploit their position of trust should be viewed very seriously in terms of its potential influence on pupils and be seen as a possible threat to the public interest. The panel was clear that this was a situation in which Mr Nicholson had clearly exploited his position of trust over a prolonged period of time and therefore proceeded to take this factor into account.

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 Nicholson.

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;
- the commission of a serious criminal offence, including those that resulted in a conviction or caution, paying particular attention to offences that are 'relevant matters' for the purposes of the Police Act 1997 and criminal record disclosures;
- 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);
- an abuse of any trust, knowledge, or influence gained through their professional position in order to advance a romantic or sexual relationship with a pupil or former pupil;
- sexual misconduct, e.g. involving actions that were sexually motivated or of a sexual nature and/or that use or exploit the trust, knowledge or influence derived from the individual's professional position;
- failure to act on evidence that indicated a child's welfare may have been at risk e.g. failed to notify the designated safeguarding lead and/or make a referral to children's social care, the police or other relevant agencies when abuse, neglect and/or harmful cultural practices were identified;

- 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;

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.

Mr Nicholson's actions were clearly deliberate.

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

The panel did not have evidence that Mr Nicholson showed exceptionally high standards in his personal and professional conduct or that he had contributed significantly to the education sector. The panel did not accept that the incident was out of character noting again that these incidents occurred over a prolonged period of time.

The panel was not drawn to any evidence that Mr Nicholson had previously been subject to disciplinary findings or warnings.

The panel noted the evidence it had as to the impact of Mr Nicholson's actions. The panel noted Student A's evidence [REDACTED]. The panel noted that it appeared from the facts that Mr Nicholson had seriously influenced Student A's college and university choices and that the relationship clearly interfered with her ability to prepare for and therefore engage in public examinations.

The panel also noted Person B's evidence that before [REDACTED], therefore before her relationship with Mr Nicholson, Student A was a different person full of life and confident and that by [REDACTED]. She stated that the relationship with Mr Nicholson seemed to consume so much of Student A's childhood and that Student A [REDACTED] and it had been hard for Student A to put this behind her.

The panel considered the character reference submitted on behalf of Mr Nicholson, which pertained to his professional conduct and character. The panel noted that no

references were provided from any former colleagues that could attest to his abilities as a teacher. The panel particularly noted the following:

- *“I am confident in saying that Lee is a person of high moral character who is motivated by a strong sense of social responsibility and ethics. Lee is a wholly reliable, loyal, and genuinely kind person who consistently shows up for his friends and family, regularly going out of his way to help me as well as others, often in exceptional circumstances. I know he has done so without the requirement for thanks, recognition, or repayment, and I trust him implicitly.”*

[REDACTED] academic and friend of Mr Nicholson

The panel considered Mr Nicholson’s level of insight shown in his written statements. The panel noted that Mr Nicholson accepted that he had breached professional boundaries, shared personal contact details with a pupil, failed to follow safeguarding procedures, and allowed the relationship with Student A to develop beyond what was professionally appropriate.

Mr Nicholson repeatedly acknowledged that these were serious errors of judgement for which he was personally responsible and accepted that neither his intentions nor his concern for Student A justified his conduct.

Mr Nicholson expressed regret, shame and sorrow for both his conduct and its impact on Student A. He described it as *“devastating”* to read of the effect his actions had had on her and accepted that his conduct amounted to serious misconduct.

Mr Nicholson also provided some limited evidence of reflection. He stated that he [REDACTED] sought to understand the personal characteristics that contributed to his poor decision-making, including his difficulty dealing with confrontation and setting appropriate boundaries. He stated that he would not repeat the mistakes he made. Whilst continuing to dispute certain allegations, including that his conduct was sexually motivated, he accepted the seriousness of his misconduct.

The panel though noted that which it had found proven, including that Mr Nicholson had engaged in a wholly inappropriate, sexually motivated, relationship with a child over a prolonged period. The panel considered that Mr Nicholson, including in his repeated explanations in his evidence for continuing that conduct, appeared to fail to acknowledge that the choice to continue such sexually motivated and often controlling communications, the repeated illicit meetings and the physical contact in which they had engaged had, at all times, been his and that it was a conscious decision.

The panel did not find plausible Mr Nicholson’s evidence that those allegations to which he admitted were the result of *“naivety” “errors” “poor judgement”* and *“misguided good intentions”* and considered the facts, in particular the often sexual content of the detailed

communications between him and Student A as well as the allegations which it had found proven ran wholly counter to such a submission.

The panel did not accept that Mr Nicholson's actions as found proven could be described as an "*isolated incident*", as he sought to describe them, when they traversed a number of years during which Mr Nicholson would have received repeated safeguarding training but nevertheless continued to take steps wholly and repeatedly in breach of his professional duties and wholly against the child's best interests.

Mr Nicholson was in a relationship from which there could be nothing approaching parity as a fully grown adult against a [REDACTED] child. Mr Nicholson failed to recognise that it was his dishonest conduct, and what frequently appeared to be his manipulative approach in correspondence with Student A, that had perpetuated the relationship. The panel noted that it was plain from the correspondence it had seen that Student A offered many opportunities early on to cease the correspondence, and therefore the relationship, and Mr Nicholson repeatedly indicated that he wished it to continue.

The panel was not satisfied that the insight which had so clearly eluded Mr Nicholson (even to the extent of reporting any of his actions or Student A's actions [REDACTED] for eight years or more could be so easily gained, or that he had meaningfully gained that insight and the panel considered that without that insight he would not be capable of developing sincere remorse for his actions.

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 Mr Nicholson 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 Mr Nicholson. The long list of factors which it identified from the Advice suggesting that a prohibition order would be appropriate, as well as Mr Nicholson's failure to escalate countless safeguarding concerns over four years or more, his exploiting of his position of trust and his engaging in a sexually motivated relationship, including extensive communication and physical contact with a child over that period were all significant factors 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.

These include:

- serious sexual misconduct e.g. where the act was sexually motivated and resulted in, or had the potential to result in, harm to a person or persons, particularly where the individual has used their professional position to influence or exploit a person or persons; and
- any sexual misconduct involving a child.

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.

These include:

- possession (including for personal use) of any class A drug.

The panel reminded itself that it had concluded that whilst Mr Nicholson had shown some limited insight with regard to his actions that insight was pleaded from the perspective of misjudgement and sincere innocent intent rather than an acknowledgment of the sexually motivated dishonest and wholly inappropriate serious conduct which it had found proven.

The panel noted that Mr Nicholson admitted that he had failed in his responsibility to handle the situation with Student A appropriately and according to his training and the policies of the School however the panel considered that Mr Nicholson, whom it noted had failed to attend the hearing, had ultimately failed to recognise that had he not taken the many and various steps which he took and had he instead applied appropriate professional conduct from the start then none of the damage which he had caused to Student A would have transpired.

Insofar then as Mr Nicholson failed seemingly to properly identify the triggers and motivations which had underlain his conduct, or develop sufficient meaningful insight, the panel considered that, were he allowed to return to teaching, notwithstanding his indications that he had no such intention, there was a real risk that this conduct could be repeated.

The panel kept in mind the extremely serious nature of the misconduct which it had found proven including Mr Nicholson's continuing a sexually motivated relationship with a child for a number of years that anyone, let alone a qualified teacher, would recognise was wholly unacceptable, inappropriate and which he repeatedly sought to dishonestly actively conceal, was such as to be wholly incompatible with Mr Nicholson returning to the teaching profession.

The panel decided that the findings indicated a situation in which a review period would not be appropriate and, as such, decided that it would be proportionate, in all the circumstances, for the prohibition order to be recommended without provisions for a review period.

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 some of the allegations proven and found that those proven facts amount to unacceptable professional conduct, conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute and a relevant conviction. In this case, the panel has found some 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 Mr Lee Nicholson should be the subject of a prohibition order, with no provision for a review period.

In particular, the panel has found that Mr Nicholson 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 Nicholson, 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 Nicholson fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession.

The findings of misconduct are particularly serious as they include a finding of engaging in sexually motivated behaviour towards a child, which the panel has found occurred over a prolonged period.

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, conduct likely to bring the profession into disrepute, and a relevant conviction, 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 Nicholson, 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 safeguard pupils. The panel has observed that due to the “...*findings against Mr Nicholson, which involved extensive sexually motivated and inappropriate communications with a child over a prolonged period, there was a strong public interest consideration engaged 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, “*Mr Nicholson expressed regret, shame and sorrow for both his conduct and its impact on Student A. He described it as “devastating” to read of the effect his actions had had on her and accepted that his conduct amounted to serious misconduct.*”

The panel has further commented that “*Mr Nicholson also provided some limited evidence of reflection*”.

However, the panel has also stated that it “...*did not find plausible Mr Nicholson’s evidence that those allegations to which he admitted were the result of “naivety” “errors”*”

“poor judgement” and “misguided good intentions” and considered the facts, in particular the often sexual content of the detailed communications between him and Student A as well as the allegations which it had found proven ran wholly counter to such a submission.”

In my judgement, this indicates a lack of full insight on behalf of the teacher, and that lack of full insight 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, *“Similarly, the panel considered that public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Mr Nicholson were not treated with the utmost seriousness when regulating the conduct of the profession.”*

I am particularly mindful of the findings of both sexual communication with a child and dishonesty in this case, and the impact that such findings have 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, conduct likely to bring the profession into disrepute, and a relevant conviction, 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 Nicholson himself. The panel comment that it did not have evidence Mr Nicholson *“...showed exceptionally high standards in his personal and professional conduct or that he had contributed significantly to the education sector.”*

I have also considered the positive character reference the panel has considered on behalf of Mr Nicholson.

A prohibition order would prevent Mr Nicholson 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 considerable weight on the panel's comments concerning the lack of insight or remorse. The panel has said, *“The panel was not satisfied that the*

insight which had so clearly eluded Mr Nicholson (even to the extent of reporting any of his actions or Student A's actions [REDACTED]) for eight years or more could be so easily gained, or that he had meaningfully gained that insight and the panel considered that without that insight he would not be capable of developing sincere remorse for his actions."

I have also placed considerable weight on the finding of the panel that, whilst engaging in sexual communications with a child, "...Mr Nicholson had clearly exploited his position of trust over a prolonged period of time..."

I have given less weight in my consideration of sanction therefore, to the contribution that Mr Nicholson 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 full 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 that no provision should be made for a review period.

In considering whether to recommend a review period, the panel has said, *"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."*

These include:

- *serious sexual misconduct e.g. where the act was sexually motivated and resulted in, or had the potential to result in, harm to a person or persons, particularly where the individual has used their professional position to influence or exploit a person or persons; and*
- *any sexual misconduct involving a child."*

I have also considered the panel's comments,

"The panel kept in mind the extremely serious nature of the misconduct which it had found proven including Mr Nicholson's continuing a sexually motivated relationship with a child for a number of years that anyone, let alone a qualified teacher, would recognise was wholly unacceptable, inappropriate and which he repeatedly sought to dishonestly actively conceal, was such as to be wholly incompatible with Mr Nicholson returning to the teaching profession."

The panel has also considered the risk of repetition of the proven conduct. The panel has found that “...*there was a real risk that this conduct could be repeated.*”

I have considered whether not allowing a 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 allowing a review period is not sufficient to achieve the aim of maintaining public confidence in the profession. These elements are the sexually motivated behaviour, the dishonesty found, and the lack of evidence of full insight or remorse.

I consider therefore that allowing for no review period is necessary to maintain public confidence and is proportionate and in the public interest.

This means that Mr Lee Nicholson is prohibited from teaching indefinitely and cannot teach in any school, sixth form college, relevant youth accommodation or children’s home in England. Furthermore, in view of the seriousness of the allegations found proved against him, I have decided that Mr Nicholson shall not be entitled to apply for restoration of his eligibility to teach.

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

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Blomfield', written in a cursive style.

Decision maker: Stuart Blomfield

Date: 10 August 2026

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