



Teaching
Regulation
Agency

Mr Ross Bullen: Professional conduct panel 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 Ross Bullen

Teacher ref number: 1283331

Teacher date of birth: 16 July 1988

TRA reference: 22847

Date of determination: 4 August 2026

Former employer: Priory Rise School, Milton Keynes

Introduction

A professional conduct panel (“the panel”) of the Teaching Regulation Agency (“the TRA”) convened from 8 to 10 June 2026 at Cheylesmore House, 5 Quinton Road, Coventry CV1 2WT, and on 4 August 2026 as a virtual panel, to consider the case of Mr Ross Bullen.

The panel members were Mr Paul Hawkins (lay panellist – in the chair), Ms Gill Lyon (teacher panellist) and Ms Amanda Godfrey (teacher panellist).

The legal adviser to the panel was Mrs Charlotte Belcher of Eversheds Sutherland (International) LLP solicitors.

The presenting officer for the TRA was Mr Ben Bentley of Browne Jacobson solicitors.

Mr Bullen was present and was represented by Mr Samuel Skinner KC of Group 36 Chambers and Mr Mike Haywood of Woodfines Solicitors.

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

Allegations

The panel considered the allegations set out in the notice of proceedings dated 25 February 2026.

It was alleged that Mr Bullen was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, in that whilst employed as a teacher at Priory Rise School:

1. Between around March and May 2023, he sent one or more sexually explicit images and/or messages to Person A.
2. His behaviour as may be found proven at 1 above was conduct of a sexual nature and/or was sexually motivated.
3. His behaviour as may be found proven at 1 above was despite the fact he was aware Person A was 15 years old.

Mr Bullen did not admit the alleged facts of the allegations, and he did not admit that he is guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

Summary of evidence

Documents

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

Section 1: Notice of proceedings and response – pages 3 to 11

Section 2: Anonymised pupil list – pages 12 to 13

Section 3: Teaching Regulation Agency witness statements – pages 15 to 33

Section 4: Teaching Regulation Agency documents – pages 34 to 122

Section 5: Teacher documents – pages 123 to 127

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

In addition, the teacher's representative read an agreed fact for the panel prior to closing submissions as follows:

In the consideration of this case, the panel had regard to the document Teacher misconduct: Disciplinary procedures for the teaching profession 2020, (the "Procedures").

Witnesses

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

Witness A – [REDACTED]; and

Person A

Mr Bullen also gave oral evidence to the panel.

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 Bullen was employed at Priory Rise School (“the School”) since 1 January 2019 as a class teacher and a data and assessment manager. A report was made to the police by the School on 23 May 2023. Mr Bullen was dismissed from the School on 16 October 2023.

Findings of fact

The findings of fact are as follows:

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

1. Between around March and May 2023, you sent one or more sexually explicit images and/or messages to Person A.

The panel had written evidence, and it was accepted by Mr Bullen, that he was working as a teacher at the School including during the period March to May 2023.

The panel first considered the evidence it had heard in respect of the images in this case, both in terms of the number and the nature of them. Witness A had provided a witness statement for the TRA proceedings which confirmed that she had received a police report on 23 May 2023 indicating that Mr Bullen had sent a number of photographs to Person A. As part of the police investigation, Person A consented to a download of data from his mobile phone. Witness A’s witness statement confirmed there were seven distinctly different images found on Person A’s mobile phone when downloaded. Witness A confirmed there were some duplicate images within the set recovered from the phone. Six of these recovered images were explicit in nature and *“appear to have been taken in a bathroom or a bedroom and show Mr Bullen in various states of undress.”* The oral

evidence heard from Witness A was that these images all had a creation date of 21 May 2023.

Given the nature of the images, these were not provided to the panel, however, the explicit nature of the images recovered on the phone was confirmed by Witness A, and Person A. In the written submission made on behalf of Mr Bullen for the TRA proceedings it was confirmed that *“there is evidence that [Person A] was in possession of 5 or 6 explicit photographs of Mr Bullen”*. The panel noted therefore that there was no dispute that there were one or more images found on Person A’s mobile phone and therefore he was in possession of them.

Considering all of this evidence, the panel was satisfied on the balance of probabilities that one or more explicit images were identified on Person A’s phone with a creation date within the date range alleged.

The panel next considered the evidence in respect of “sexually explicit messages”. Aside from the images referred to above, the police were unable to recover any other Snapchat data, including images or messages. Person A had confirmed in his oral evidence he had also attempted to download this data from Snapchat but he had been unable to do so. The panel accepted Person A’s evidence that this history had been deleted when Mr Bullen had blocked him on Snapchat, due to its functionality, which was repeated in Witness A’s evidence. Given that there was no documentary evidence provided to the panel in relation to specific explicit messages, the panel was not satisfied on the balance of probabilities that one or more explicit messages were sent to Person A. The panel however noted the formulation of the allegation was such that it only needed to find that sexually explicit images or messages were sent to Person A for this allegation to be found proven.

Finally, the panel considered whether the sexually explicit images were “sent” to Person A by Mr Bullen. The panel had regard to the ordinary English meaning of the word “sent” when considering this allegation. The panel considered that this was a word which was commonly used and it did not consider there was any difficulty in understanding the meaning of the verb in the context of this allegation.

The panel was required to carefully balance the competing evidence in respect of whether explicit images were “sent” to Person A by Mr Bullen and in particular it was important to consider credibility of witnesses and the weight which should be attributed to the evidence. The panel had concluded on the balance of probabilities that sexually explicit images of Mr Bullen had been found on Person A’s phone. The matter for the panel to determine was whether they were sent to him by Mr Bullen. The panel was not required to conclude how they came into his possession.

The panel heard helpful evidence from Person A and Mr Bullen in respect of the use of Snapchat and its functionality, to assist with the panel’s understanding of the platform. Mr

Bullen did not disagree with the evidence of Person A in respect of this. The panel understood that broadly there were several ways to send an image on Snapchat, including (a) choosing to take an image whilst within a direct message to the recipient and (b) taking an image in Snapchat, where Snapchat will then bring up a menu of Snapchat connections with which you can share the image. The panel noted it was possible that images could inadvertently be sent to somebody in that list of connections.

Person A's account to the panel was that he had been added to Snapchat by "RossAlex" (which it is accepted is Mr Bullen's Snapchat username) and had engaged initially in "*innocuous*" conversation with him. Person A's evidence was that he began to receive unsolicited explicit images and videos from Mr Bullen. Person A was able to describe some details relating to those images, including the background to the images. Person A's account was that he did nothing to encourage the sending of the images. The evidence from Person A was not clear in respect of whether he saved the images in the Snapchat chat as the conversation progressed, but the panel did have independent evidence to confirm that images were screenshotted on 21 May 2023 and they were found on Person A's mobile phone when the police downloaded the data.

Person A's evidence was that he was able to identify Mr Bullen as the same person using the username "RossAlex" on Snapchat because Mr Bullen had turned on Snapchat maps, which showed his location. Person A's evidence was that he believed Mr Bullen to be a teacher based on an image he had seen of Mr Bullen in what appeared to be a school. Therefore, he logged onto Snapchat maps during the school day and located Mr Bullen at the School. Following this, he was able to identify Mr Bullen by comparing the images he had received to the teacher's found on the School's website. Following this, Person A reported this to Mr Bullen's school and the panel had received a copy of that email.

Person A's evidence was that notifications were sent by Snapchat when a recipient saved an image into the Snapchat chat, or when an image was screenshotted by a recipient. This was not disputed by Mr Bullen. Mr Bullen's evidence was that he would receive these notifications at times. The notification from Snapchat in respect of a screenshot was described as more 'alarming', with an "X" image shown on the screen with the notification. Person A's account was that he did not screenshot the images sooner because he believed Mr Bullen would block him on Snapchat before he had obtained sufficient evidence. Person A implied he had a moral duty to take action having been sent explicit images by an adult. Mr Bullen's evidence was that he would not have blocked a person for saving images of him. It had been explained to the panel that there was a difference on Snapchat between saving an image in a chat and screenshotting an image.

Mr Bullen's evidence throughout was that he did not send Person A explicit images, but he did use Snapchat to send explicit images to "*consenting adults*". Mr Bullen told the

panel he would only send content to people he knew would want to receive it. He later contradicted this by stating that he also made explicit images available to all of his Snapchat connections. However, he also confirmed that he accepted all connection requests on Snapchat without looking at their names or establishing their ages when he accepted them. He stated he had thousands of Snapchat connections at the time. Mr Bullen accepted it was possible he had connections who were under the age of 18 years. The panel did not have any documentary evidence to confirm whether Person A was a Snapchat connection of Mr Bullen. Person A had attempted to obtain more information from Snapchat but had been unable to do so. The police were in possession of Mr Bullen's phone but were unable to access it without the PIN number.

It was suggested by those representing Mr Bullen that the presence of duplicate images on Person A's mobile phone was suggestive that they had been sent to him by another person (e.g. one of the consenting adults, which was a position which Mr Bullen had suggested in his earlier account in the School's investigation). The panel did not have any technical evidence before it in respect of the download of the mobile telephone that might have assisted in ascertaining this. Mr Bullen had also suggested that he was subject to a malicious complaint by Person A and this (together with other explanations such as being sent the images by a third party) was put to Person A in his oral evidence, which he strongly denied. The panel was however clear that the burden was on the TRA to prove the case it had brought and it was not for Mr Bullen to explain how Person A came into possession of the images of him or disprove their Snapchat connection.

Witness A was unable to assist the panel with whether the explicit images were "sent" to Person A by Mr Bullen, as the police had been unable to obtain any further Snapchat data by way of messages or images. Witness A [REDACTED].

The only direct evidence available to the panel that the images had been sent by Mr Bullen was Person A's witness evidence. The panel accepted that there could be other possible explanations in how the images came to be stored on Person A's phone. In those circumstances, the panel carefully considered the credibility of Person A's evidence. The panel considered the extent to which Person A's account remained consistent during the course of giving evidence; whether Person A's account remained consistent with what he had said on previous occasions; how inherently probable his evidence was and the extent to which his evidence was corroborated by contemporaneous evidence to the extent there was any such evidence available.

The panel acknowledged that there were some inconsistencies in Person A's evidence, including in respect of the day of the week on which he turned on Snapchat maps and identified Mr Bullen, thereafter reporting him to his school, and in respect of the timeframe of the report in relation to his birthday.

The panel also acknowledged that Person A had confirmed he had been involved previously in a similar online incident, [REDACTED]. The panel noted that this was documented in Person A's [REDACTED] interview on 31 May 2023.

However, the panel also considered that Person A's response to questioning in respect of these inconsistencies was credible. There had been a passage of three years since the events and the panel noted that witnesses cannot be expected to remember events with crystal clarity which happened three years ago. Further, the panel accepted Person A's evidence that he had not received any contact in respect of this case following the police investigation prior to being contacted by the TRA, and so there was a substantial period of time where he had not been required to consider these matters. Person A had acknowledged in his oral evidence that his contemporaneous account to the police at the time would be more accurate in terms of the detail of the case. In terms of the differences between the accounts, Person A explained to the panel that his mother was present at the first meeting (prior to his ABE interview) and he was concerned about the impact of hearing about the events on her, so sought to minimise what happened whilst she was present. The panel noted that there was a great deal of consistency in Person A's other contemporaneous accounts. The panel noted that screenshots of explicit images were found on Person A's phone, which was consistent with his account of the steps he took in identifying Mr Bullen. The panel also considered that it was improbable that Person A would have fabricated his complaint. There was no evidence that he knew Mr Bullen or had any credible motivation for such a fabrication. The panel considered that there was credible prima facie evidence that Person A had been sent the images by Mr Bullen.

The panel then considered Mr Bullen's credibility and consistency of his accounts. The panel noted that Mr Bullen's evidence in respect of his response to the allegations had changed, and that he had introduced new information in his oral evidence, such as in respect of his use of Snapchat stories to share explicit content with his thousands of Snapchat connections. Mr Bullen had also confirmed in oral evidence that during the School's investigation he was concerned with protecting his career and had therefore not been as open as he could have been in some accounts. The panel recognised that it did not follow from this that Mr Bullen's evidence as a whole was tainted. Nevertheless, on balancing the evidence, the panel found Person A's account to be more credible.

Having weighed all of the evidence before it, the panel considered it was more likely than not that the images were sent to Person A by Mr Bullen in one of the ways in which images can be shared on Snapchat, as set out above, within the message or by selecting the people with whom he wished to share an image.

Allegation 1 was therefore found proved on the balance of probabilities.

2. Your behaviour as may be found proven at 1 above was conduct of a sexual nature and/or was sexually motivated.

The panel went on to consider this allegation, as the behaviour alleged in allegation 1 had been found proved. The panel specifically noted that this allegation related to the conduct of sharing the images with Person A and the nature or motivation of the conduct. The age of Person A was not relevant in relation to this allegation. The panel was clear that the allegations were drafted such that the age of Person A was to be considered solely within allegation 3 below.

The panel first considered whether the conduct was sexual in nature, having regard to the legal advice provided in respect of where conduct may be considered sexual in nature.

The panel noted that sharing explicit images with Person A was inherently sexual in nature, given the sexual nature of the images. Six of the images retrieved from Person A's phone were described by Witness A as being "*in a bathroom or a bedroom and show Mr Bullen in various states of undress*". The panel noted that Mr Bullen did not dispute that Person A had obtained the images, that these were images of him and they were explicit.

The panel also considered the purpose for which Mr Bullen shared explicit images on Snapchat, including, the panel found as set out in allegation 1, with Person A. Whilst denying he sent images to Person A specifically, Mr Bullen admitted in his evidence that he shared images because he "*craved the attention*" as a "*sexual thrill*". It made him feel "*wanted*" and "*confident*". This suggested that the sharing of explicit images was sexual in nature.

In light of all of the evidence, the panel considered that a reasonable person would determine that Mr Bullen's actions were sexual in nature.

The panel next considered whether the conduct was sexually motivated, noting the legal advice provided in respect of where conduct may be considered sexually motivated.

The panel noted that Mr Bullen had provided the panel with candid evidence in respect of the motivation for sharing explicit images on Snapchat, as set out above, which indicated to the panel sexual gratification. The panel accepted that this was not in the pursuit of a sexual relationship with Person A. The panel considered a reasonable person would determine that Mr Bullen's actions were sexually motivated.

Taking account of all of the evidence before it, the panel found that, on the balance of probabilities, the conduct found proved in allegation 1 was sexual in nature and sexually motivated. Allegation 2 was therefore found proved.

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

3. Your behaviour as may be found proven at 1 above was despite the fact you were aware Person A was 15 years old.

The panel went on to consider this allegation, as the behaviour alleged in allegation 1 had been found proved.

The panel noted that Person A's date of birth was [REDACTED]. This meant that Person A was 15 years old until [REDACTED], during the earlier part of the time frame set out in allegation 1, and 16 years old from [REDACTED] through [REDACTED].

The panel noted that there was limited evidence presented that Person A was 15 years old when Mr Bullen sent the explicit images to him i.e. that they were sent to him prior to [REDACTED]. In his oral evidence, Person A indicated that, whilst the screenshots of the images recovered by the police from his phone were created on 21 May 2023, they showed in the top left corner the date sent as being March 2023.

The panel had regard again to the evidence set out above from Witness A in respect of the police data report showing six explicit images recovered from Person A's mobile phone which all had a creation date of 21 May 2023, but she confirmed she had not viewed the images because they were retrieved by Person A's local police force. At this time, Person A was 16 years old. The police were unable to recover any other Snapchat data, including images or messages, from within the timeframe March to May 2023. Person A had confirmed in his oral evidence he had also attempted to download this data from Snapchat but had been unable to do so. The panel accepted Person A's evidence that this had been deleted when Mr Bullen had blocked him on Snapchat, due to its functionality, which was repeated in Witness A evidence.

The panel noted that, given the nature of the images, it had not seen them, nor had the presenting officer been able to provide any evidence to corroborate the account of Person A that the screenshots showed the date the images were sent to him when this was sought by the panel. The panel noted that the police had held the images for nearly three years and had been unable to ascertain the date on which they were sent to Person A.

On the balance of probabilities, and given the creation date, the panel did not consider that it had been proven that it was more likely than not that these images were sent to Person A when he was 15 years old.

Having considered the evidence in relation to the date the images were sent to Person A, the panel considered whether Mr Bullen was aware of Person A's age when he sent the images. The panel noted the evidence was limited in this regard. In his oral evidence,

Person A confirmed that he told Mr Bullen during the messages exchanged on Snapchat that he was 15 years old, which was consistent with his written statement for these TRA proceedings dated 2 July 2025, with his email report to the School on 21 May 2023, with his first report to the police when they attended his home on 23 May 2023 and with the account provided to the police during his ABE interview on 31 May 2023. As set out above, the police had been unable to retrieve any messages from Snapchat indicating that Mr Bullen was aware of Person A's age when he sent the images. The panel noted that Mr Bullen had been consistent in his accounts that he shared explicit images with consenting adults but that he would not do so knowingly with a 15 year old, although he did not verify the age of all of his connections on acceptance.

On the balance of probabilities, the panel did not consider that it had been proven that it was likely that Mr Bullen was aware of Person A's age when he sent the images to him.

Allegation 3 was therefore found not proved.

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

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

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

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

The panel was not satisfied that the conduct of Mr Bullen, in relation to the facts found proved, involved breaches of the Teachers' Standards. In particular, the panel had regard to the fact that Person A was not a pupil at the School and that it had not received any evidence in respect of breaches of the School's ethos and policies.

Although it carefully considered the paragraphs in respect of online safety, the panel was not satisfied that the conduct of Mr Bullen, in relation to the facts found proved, involved breaches of Keeping Children Safe In Education ("KCSIE").

The panel was not satisfied that the conduct of Mr Bullen, in relation to the facts found proved, involved breaches of Working Together to Safeguard Children.

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

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

The panel found that the offence types of sexual activity and sexual communication with a child were relevant. The panel noted that the Advice confirms in the footnote that *"for the purposes of this advice a child includes everyone under the age of 18"* and therefore this applies in circumstances where Person A was 16 years old.

The panel noted that the allegations took place outside the education setting. The panel had not received any evidence that the actions found proved would impact Mr Bullen's ability to fulfil his teaching role or that it would have led to *pupils* being exposed to or influenced by the behaviour in a harmful way. The panel noted that Mr Bullen was entitled to use Snapchat and entitled to a private life.

For these reasons, the panel was not satisfied that the conduct of Mr Bullen amounted to misconduct of a serious nature which fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession.

Accordingly, the panel was not satisfied that Mr Bullen was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct.

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

As set out above in the panel's findings as to whether Mr Bullen was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct, the Panel found that the offence types of sexual activity and sexual communication with a child (meaning a person under the age of 18) were relevant.

The panel considered the following points were also relevant in determining whether Mr Bullen's conduct amounted to conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute:

- The panel noted that the age from which you can hold a Snapchat account (with parental permission) is 13 years old. The panel acknowledged, as a general principle, that there are Snapchat users who are under the age of 18. Mr Bullen

accepted in his oral evidence that it was logically possible that he could be connected with Snapchat users under the age of 18 and he did not think this through at the time.

- The panel noted that there was a lack of online safety shown by Mr Bullen, for example in respect of his Snapchat settings and username. Mr Bullen accepted he was aware of the risks of online behaviour. Although he did not recall this being part of specific training at the School, he accepted the broad point that this would have been covered in safeguarding and that he was aware of the risk of online harm.
- Mr Bullen admitted in his oral evidence that he was engaging in risky behaviour online and there was a risk this could have escalated had it continued. [REDACTED]. The panel noted that Mr Bullen accepted in his oral evidence that he did not check the names or ages of his connection requests, but accepted every request he received, which suggested to the panel that Mr Bullen was reckless as to whether his connections were under the age of 18 when he accepted them.
- Mr Bullen candidly described himself as *“Stupid. Reckless. Foolish”* in his oral evidence.
- In the written note of the School’s disciplinary appeal hearing, it is noted that he said *“I understand that it is bringing the school into disrepute.”*

Given the nature of them, the findings of misconduct are serious and the panel considered the conduct displayed would be likely to have a negative impact on the individual’s status as a teacher. The panel considered a member of the public would be concerned if it became aware that Mr Bullen had sent explicit images to Person A, who was under the age of 18, and that this action was of a sexual nature and/or was sexually motivated. The panel considered that Mr Bullen’s conduct could potentially damage the public’s perception of a teacher.

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

Panel’s recommendation to the Secretary of State

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

In considering whether to recommend to the Secretary of State that a prohibition order should be made, the panel had to consider whether it would be an appropriate and

proportionate measure, and whether it would be in the public interest to do so. Prohibition orders should not be given in order to be punitive, or to show that blame has been apportioned, although they are likely to have punitive effect.

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

The panel considered that public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Mr Bullen 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 Bullen was outside that which could reasonably be tolerated. The panel was particularly mindful of the risk-taking nature of the behaviour and the online recklessness shown by Mr Bullen.

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 Bullen in the profession.

The panel decided that there was a public interest consideration in retaining the teacher in the profession, since no doubt had been cast upon his abilities as an educator, although the panel noted it had little evidence of this before it. Mr Bullen had taught at one school and he had been promoted, which indicated he had potential in progressing his teaching career. The panel was not presented with any other evidence in relation to whether Mr Bullen is able to make a valuable contribution to the profession.

The panel considered carefully the seriousness of the behaviour, noting that the Advice states that the expectation of both the public and pupils, is that members of the teaching profession maintain a high level of integrity and ethical standards at all times. The panel considered the behaviour was serious, given the level of recklessness shown by Mr Bullen in his online behaviour.

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 Bullen.

The panel took further account of the Advice beginning on page 15, 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:

- 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; and
- a deep-seated attitude that leads to harmful behaviour.

The panel considered that sexual misconduct was relevant even though it had not been found to be unacceptable professional misconduct because Mr Bullen's risk-taking actions, and failing to ensure he was communicating with an adult led to him engaging in sexual communications with a person under the age of 18, which the public would be concerned by.

The panel noted that the allegations found proved included online behaviours. In accordance with paragraph 41 of the Advice, the panel has considered the appropriate weight and seriousness to attribute to online behaviours. The panel noted the recklessness of Mr Bullen's online behaviour and that Mr Bullen accepted every request he received, which suggested to the panel that Mr Bullen was reckless as to whether his connections were under the age of 18 when he accepted them. Mr Bullen accepted he was aware of the risks of online behaviour and that there was a risk his behaviour could have escalated had it continued. The panel noted that Mr Bullen was seeking this attention, as he was complimented and validated by it.

The panel also noted that Mr Bullen had admitted that his privacy and security settings were not very robust on Snapchat, although on Facebook he had the highest privacy settings. The panel considered that Mr Bullen's reckless attitude towards accepting Snapchat connections and his failure to have appropriate privacy settings on Snapchat were serious issues.

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

There was no evidence that Mr Bullen's actions were not deliberate.

There was no evidence to suggest that Mr Bullen was acting under extreme duress, e.g. a physical threat or significant intimidation. However, the panel noted that [REDACTED].

The panel acknowledged that Mr Bullen's representative submitted that Mr Bullen had a previously good history and had "much to offer the profession", but it did not have any direct evidence of this, save for the fact that Mr Bullen had recently been promoted to Assistant Headteacher at the School. No character references had been provided. The panel did not have any evidence of Mr Bullen demonstrating exceptionally high standards in both his personal conduct or of him having contributed significantly to the education sector.

There was no evidence that showed Mr Bullen was previously subject to disciplinary proceedings/warnings.

The panel considered whether there were any other mitigating factors in this case:

- The panel noted that Mr Bullen had engaged fully with the TRA process.
- The panel noted that there was no evidence that the sexual misconduct had an impact on his pupils. Person A was not a pupil at Mr Bullen's school. The panel accepted Mr Bullen's submission that this took place in his private life and that it was lawful, insofar as he considered it to be messages exchanged between consenting adults. However, it was accepted by Mr Bullen that he accepted all requests on Snapchat and therefore he did not know with whom he was connected or their ages.
- Further, the panel noted that Mr Bullen had described the sending of sexual messages and images as a [REDACTED]. Mr Bullen's evidence was that he no longer engaged in this behaviour (albeit the panel did not have any independent evidence of [REDACTED]).

The panel went on to consider the level of insight and remorse shown by Mr Bullen. The panel noted Mr Bullen's evidence at the School's appeal hearing, where he stated:

"I can see it was really questionable, it is regrettable. I should have behaved differently... I can really see that in hindsight, I can see that is where the focus should be, it is the second allegation about being a danger to children, I don't see how my behaviour is a danger to children."

Mr Bullen's insight appeared to develop during the course of these proceedings. In the submissions of Mr Bullen's representative, it is stated that *"Mr Bullen shared explicit images online using Snap Chat with other [REDACTED]; all of whom were adults."* Whereas during his evidence, Mr Bullen then accepted that he accepted all requests on Snapchat and he did not check the ages before accepting them. Further, the TRA proceedings were the first time Snapchat "stories" were mentioned and Mr Bullen admitted in his oral evidence that he wished he had been more open previously in relation to the prolific use of Snapchat, but that he was "trying to protect" himself and his career. Mr Bullen stated he was sorry and that he was being open now to the panel.

In his evidence in the TRA proceedings, Mr Bullen admitted that he was foolish and stupid. The panel considered that he had reflected on his behaviour and the impact on him and his partner.

The panel did not have any evidence that there was direct impact on Person A and as such Mr Bullen did not specifically acknowledge that there was any impact. The panel

was concerned that during the cross examination of Person A, he was accused of having a [REDACTED] for the allegations. The panel did not accept that this was the motivation for Person A's complaint against Mr Bullen, and was concerned that this demonstrated deficiencies in Mr Bullen's understanding of his own failings, and showed some disregard for the impact on Person A.

The panel was concerned as to the depth of Mr Bullen's insight. The panel noted that Mr Bullen had recognised his behaviour as [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and stated he no longer engaged in such behaviour. The panel did not have any independent evidence from [REDACTED]. In light of this, the panel considered there was a potential risk of repetition.

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 Bullen 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 Bullen. The riskiness of his online behaviour and the recklessness showed in who Mr Bullen was sending messages of a sexual nature to, were significant factors in forming that opinion. The panel also considered there was a potential risk of repetition of this behaviour, [REDACTED]. 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.

In paragraph 49 of 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.

The relevant section in this case is:

- any sexual misconduct involving a child.

The Advice confirms that a child is defined as a person under the age of 18. Whilst the panel recognised that this case involved findings of sexual misconduct and there was the potential to cause harm to a person, the panel did not accept it was at the serious end of sexual misconduct such that “serious sexual misconduct” was relevant in this case. The panel noted that Mr Bullen’s view was that he was sharing images with consenting adults, that this was lawful behaviour and that Mr Bullen was entitled to a private life. However, the panel noted that Mr Bullen admitted he could not confirm they were all consenting adults and he had not taken sufficient measures to ensure that this was the case, and therefore that the behaviour was lawful.

In paragraph 51 of the Advice also indicates that there are certain other types of cases where it is likely that the public interest will have greater relevance and weigh in favour of a longer period before a review is considered appropriate.

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

The panel noted that these lists are not intended to be exhaustive and panels should consider each case on its individual merits taking into account all the circumstances involved.

The panel had regard to the extent to which Mr Bullen had shown insight into his actions and remorse shown. The panel was also mindful that, whilst the behaviour was serious, that it did not involve a pupil at the School and that Mr Bullen considered he was sharing images with consenting adults. The panel acknowledged that Mr Bullen had [REDACTED] and had demonstrated remorse for his actions, but his insight into his actions was not yet fully developed.

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

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 conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

In this case, the panel has also found some of the allegations not proven. I have therefore put those matters entirely from my mind.

The findings of misconduct are serious as they include a teacher exhibiting reckless behaviour which led to him engaging in sexual communications with a person under the age of 18.

I have to determine whether the imposition of a prohibition order is proportionate and in the public interest. In assessing 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 conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, would itself be sufficient to achieve the overall aim. I have to consider whether the consequences of such a publication are themselves sufficient. I have considered therefore whether or not prohibiting Mr Bullen, and the impact that will have on the teacher, is proportionate and in the public interest.

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

“The panel noted that the allegations took place outside the education setting. The panel had not received any evidence that the actions found proved impact Mr Bullen’s ability to fulfil his teaching role or that it would have led to *pupils* being exposed to or influenced by the behaviour in a harmful way. The panel noted that Mr Bullen was entitled to use Snapchat and entitled to a private life.”

However, I am also conscious that due to his reckless behaviour, Mr Bullen gave cause for a child to be exposed to sexually explicit images of a teacher. 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 it sets out as follows:

“The panel went on to consider the level of insight and remorse shown by Mr Bullen. The panel noted Mr Bullen’s evidence at the School’s appeal hearing, where he stated:

“I can see it was really questionable, it is regrettable. I should have behaved differently... I can really see that in hindsight, I can see that is where the focus should be, it is the second allegation about being a danger to children, I don’t see how my behaviour is a danger to children.”

Mr Bullen's insight appeared to develop during the course of these proceedings. In the submissions of Mr Bullen's representative, it is stated that *"Mr Bullen shared explicit images online using Snap Chat with other [REDACTED]; all of whom were adults."* Whereas during his evidence, Mr Bullen then accepted that he accepted all requests on Snapchat and he did not check the ages before accepting them. Further, the TRA proceedings were the first time Snapchat "stories" were mentioned and Mr Bullen admitted in his oral evidence that he wished he had been more open previously in relation to the prolific use of Snapchat, but that he was "trying to protect" himself and his career. Mr Bullen stated he was sorry and that he was being open now to the panel.

In his evidence in the TRA proceedings, Mr Bullen admitted that he was foolish and stupid. The panel considered that he had reflected on his behaviour and the impact on him and his partner.

The panel did not have any evidence that there was direct impact on Person A and as such Mr Bullen did not specifically acknowledge that there was any impact. The panel was concerned that during the cross examination of Person A, he was accused of having a [REDACTED] for the allegations. The panel did not accept that this was the motivation for Person A's complaint against Mr Bullen, and was concerned that this demonstrated deficiencies in Mr Bullen's understanding of his own failings, and showed some disregard for the impact on Person A.

The panel was concerned as to the depth of Mr Bullen's insight. The panel noted that Mr Bullen had recognised his behaviour as [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and stated he no longer engaged in such behaviour. The panel did not have any independent evidence from [REDACTED]. In light of this, the panel considered there was a potential risk of repetition."

In my judgement, the panel's finding that Mr Bullen's insight is not yet fully developed means I agree with it that there is some risk of the repetition of this behaviour. 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 comments as follows:

"Given the nature of them, the findings of misconduct are serious and the panel considered the conduct displayed would be likely to have a negative impact on the individual's status as a teacher. The panel considered a member of the public would be concerned if it became aware that Mr Bullen had sent explicit images to Person A, who was under the age of 18, and that this action was of a sexual nature and/or was sexually motivated. The panel considered that Mr Bullen's conduct could potentially damage the public's perception of a teacher."

I am particularly mindful of the finding in this case of a teacher behaving in a reckless manner which resulted in him sending explicit images of himself to a child and the negative impact that such a finding is likely to 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 conduct likely to bring the profession into disrepute, in the absence of a prohibition order, can itself be regarded by such a person as being a proportionate response to the misconduct that has been found proven in this case.

I have also considered the impact of a prohibition order on Mr Bullen himself. The panel offers these observations:

"The panel acknowledged that Mr Bullen's representative submitted that Mr Bullen had a previously good history and had "much to offer the profession", but it did not have any direct evidence of this, save for the fact that Mr Bullen had recently been promoted to Assistant Headteacher at the School. No character references had been provided. The panel did not have any evidence of Mr Bullen demonstrating exceptionally high standards in both his personal conduct or of him having contributed significantly to the education sector.

There was no evidence that showed Mr Bullen was previously subject to disciplinary proceedings/warnings."

A prohibition order would prevent Mr Bullen 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 likely negative impact of Mr Bullen's reckless behaviour, which resulted in him sending sexually explicit images of himself to a child, on the standing of the profession.

I have also placed considerable weight on the panel's comments concerning the lack of full insight and the risk of repetition as well as on its findings that Mr Bullen's actions were both deliberate and committed free of extreme duress.

I have given less weight in my consideration of sanction therefore, to the contribution that Mr Bullen has made to the profession. I agree with the panel that 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

insight, does not in my view satisfy the public interest requirement concerning public confidence in the profession.

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

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

In doing so, the panel has made reference to the Advice as follows:

“In paragraph 49 of 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.

The relevant section in this case is:

- any sexual misconduct involving a child.

The Advice confirms that a child is defined as a person under the age of 18. Whilst the panel recognised that this case involved findings of sexual misconduct and there was the potential to cause harm to a person, the panel did not accept it was at the serious end of sexual misconduct such that “serious sexual misconduct” was relevant in this case. The panel noted that Mr Bullen’s view was that he was sharing images with consenting adults, that this was lawful behaviour and that Mr Bullen was entitled to a private life. However, the panel noted that Mr Bullen admitted he could not confirm they were all consenting adults and he had not taken sufficient measures to ensure that this was the case, and therefore that the behaviour was lawful.

In paragraph 51 of the Advice also indicates that there are certain other types of cases where it is likely that the public interest will have greater relevance and weigh in favour of a longer period before a review is considered appropriate.

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

I have considered the panel’s concluding comments:

“The panel had regard to the extent to which Mr Bullen had shown insight into his actions and remorse shown. The panel was also mindful that, whilst the behaviour was serious, that it did not involve a pupil at the School and that Mr Bullen considered he was sharing images with consenting adults. The panel acknowledged that Mr Bullen had [REDACTED] and had demonstrated remorse for his actions, but his insight into his actions was not yet fully developed.

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

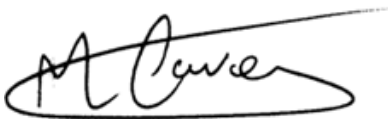
I have considered whether a two-year review period reflects the seriousness of the findings and is a proportionate period to achieve the aim of maintaining public confidence in the profession. In this case, factors mean that allowing such review period is necessary to achieve the aim of maintaining public confidence in the profession. These elements are the likely injury done to the standing of the profession by Mr Bullen’s actions as well as the risk of repetition identified by the panel and the need for him to have the time necessary to develop full insight into his behaviour should he wish to rejoin the profession in the future.

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

This means that Mr Ross Bullen is prohibited from teaching indefinitely and cannot teach in any school, sixth form college, relevant youth accommodation or children’s home in England. He may apply for the prohibition order to be set aside, but not until 13 August 2028, two years from the date of this order at the earliest. This is not an automatic right to have the prohibition order removed. If he does apply, a panel will meet to consider whether the prohibition order should be set aside. Without a successful application, Mr Bullen remains prohibited from teaching indefinitely.

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

Mr Bullen 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 'M. Cavey', enclosed within a large, loopy oval stroke.

Decision maker: Marc Cavey

Date: 6 August 2026

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