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Former Surrey teacher avoids ban from profession

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A former science teacher and head of year at a Surrey private school has avoided a ban from the profession despite sending ‘sexually explicit’ messages to three colleagues.

Leishan Silva, 44, was sacked from Downsend School in Leatherhead following an internal investigation into complaints by three female staff about inappropriate and persistent behaviour.

He later admitted to the allegations during a private misconduct hearing held by the Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA) on July 11.

Messages sent by Mr Silva were categorised as “sexually motivated” by the TRA. He sent one colleague messages like “f*** me, you look amazing”, “what’s wrong with c**, it’s natural?” and “your amazing boobs”. He also suggested he would like to see one of them wear a bikini on a school trip to a water park.

Between 2018-2023, Mr Silva pursued sexual conversations with three colleagues. The social media messages displayed what the TRA panel called “a pattern of behaviour over a sustained period”.

Despite finding Mr Silva’s actions amounted to “unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute”, the panel stopped short of recommending he should be banned from teaching.

Instead, they opted to publish the findings as a warning on the government’s website.

Also noted by the panel was Mr Silva’s “unblemished” disciplinary record and successful teaching career prior to the allegations. The panel said there was no evidence these concerns were brought to Mr Silva’s attention at an earlier stage.

His attention was drawn to these concerns retrospectively, so his poor conduct could not have been addressed earlier.

When the allegations were made by the three staff members, Downsend School launched an internal investigation, leading to a disciplinary hearing which resulted in Mr Silva being sacked from the school.

In mitigation, the panel noted Mr Silva had expressed remorse and insight regarding the harm and embarrassment he has caused to his female colleagues. He had also written apology letters to each of the colleagues. Mr Silva had told the panel that difficult personal circumstances at the time may have affected his judgment.

In isolation, the interactions with a colleague could be categorised as a ‘low level concern’ according to the TRA panel. But taken together, the panel said the messages showed a pattern of behaviour over a sustained period of time.

The report said: “Therefore, the cumulative effect of this repeated behaviour led to the panel’s determination that Mr Silva’s case amounted to unacceptable professional conduct.”

Concluding, the secretary of state said: “The publication of the findings made would be sufficient to send an appropriate message to the teacher as to the standards of behaviour that were not acceptable and that the publication would meet the public interest requirement of declaring proper standards of the profession.”

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