

NOTES ON THE STYLE OF THE LAW

Redacting [REDACTED]

by

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≈ redaction ≈ anonymity ≈ ease of reading ≈
teachers ≈ clarity ≈ pronouns ≈ consistency ≈
panels ≈



INCONSISTENT redaction is a bizarre and strange phenomenon which crops up when legal documents are prepared without much thought. A recent professional conduct panel outcome from the Teaching Regulation Agency is a good venue in which to discuss this.¹ On the first page, we read that an allegation against the teacher, Ms Mead, is that (emphasis added):

As a result of using a glue gun in her class on 13 May 2022, Pupil A sustained an injury to *his* hand.

So, we know two things about Pupil A from the first page. He was a pupil in Ms Mead's class, and he is a boy. Yet, at 6–7, we find that suddenly nearly all pronouns have been placed with the clumsy '[REDACTED]', even though the report told us on the first page the child's pronouns (emphasis added)!

As the children were packing up for the end of the day, one of the pupil's told Ms Mead that Pupil A had 'hurt' *himself*. Ms Mead spoke to Pupil A and in her evidence stated [REDACTED] was reluctant to show her [REDACTED] hand and was covering it with [REDACTED] other hand. Another pupil then moved Pupil A's hand and Ms Mead could see there was a small 'single blister' on [REDACTED] forehead. Ms Mead told Pupil A to visit the medical room, but Pupil

¹ Mead (July 2023)

A 'refused'. Ms Mead additionally told Pupil A to go and run *his* hand under the tap in the nearby toilet.

Ms Mead was required to be on gate duty that afternoon and as Pupil A left the School to go home, Ms Mead told Pupil A to show [REDACTED] hand to [REDACTED] mother when [REDACTED] got home. Ms Mead was then involved in a high-risk safeguarding issue with some other vulnerable pupils, who had not been collected at the end of the day. As she was dealing with this high-risk issue as the DSL until 16:30, Ms Mead was not able to deal with Pupil A's issue straight after school as she would normally do. As a result, Ms Mead forgot to deal with Pupil A's issues and follow the School's procedures, such as contacting [REDACTED] mother, informing the Headteacher or recording it in the School accident book. When Pupil A got home from school, [REDACTED] showed [REDACTED] hand to [REDACTED] mother. Pupil A's mother called 111 and was advised to take Pupil A to a hospital, which she did that evening.

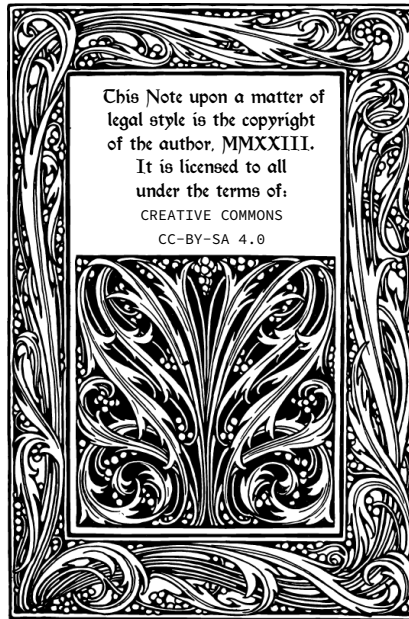
[...]

On Saturday 14 May 2022, Pupil A's mother called The Sun newspaper to report the incident. The paper subsequently ran a story under the headline "STICKY ISSUE I'm furious after my [REDACTED], burnt [REDACTED] hand at school using a glue gun – I didn't find out until [REDACTED] got home". The panel only had a copy of the headline in the evidence before it and did not have a full copy of the article.

Then, at 8, we see the use of 'his' again. This kind of over-zealous redaction is very wrong. First, because when the allegations were being pasted into the public document, it should have been obvious the Panel's use of pronouns meant it was not an anonymity risk to change earlier redactions to 'his', *etc.* Second, it is rare that gender will need to be redacted, but if it is, the singular 'they' or simply using 'Pupil A' in lieu of pronouns are much better than the ugliness of replacing a three letter word ('his') with the ugliness of '[REDACTED]'. Third, if the panel really believed that it was absolutely essential to redact gender, then the panel ought to have changed the earlier and later pages, and been consistent about eliminating Pupil A's pronouns in the passages shown.

This kind of sloppiness is regrettably common in formulaic government documents, where the concern is often less for protecting the privacy of vulnerable people and more for checking boxes. It rather upsets me both because it creates worse documents and leads to a lax approach to instances where anonymity truly is crucial.





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