

PCC upholds complaint against local newspaper about child's welfare

The Press Complaints Commission has today upheld a complaint against the Wanstead and Woodford Guardian under Clauses 1 (Accuracy) and 6 (Children) of the Editors' Code of Practice. The article contained reaction to the resignation of a teacher after it had been discovered that he also worked as a porn star. In its initial coverage of the story, the newspaper had - at the end of an article - asked for comments from pupils and parents. It had received an email apparently from the complainant's daughter (a 14-year-old girl) and published its contents. She was quoted as saying that the teacher, who taught sex education lessons, had spoken "openly and truthfully about sex" and that she would "more likely catch STIs without his lessons". The complainant contended that his daughter (who was not, in any case, a "sixth-form student") had not made any such comment to the newspaper: she had not written the email the newspaper had quoted and he believed that her account might have been used by someone else.

The newspaper said it had assumed that the comment had been submitted by someone over 16, given that it understood the teacher to have only taught sex education to sixth form students. It had not specifically interviewed the child, and did not believe that publication of comments represented an intrusion. Nonetheless, it regretted the error and undertook to amend its policy on requesting comments from readers on school-related stories.

The Commission was concerned that the newspaper had not taken more care following receipt of the email, given its content and the context of the story. In particular, it should have established the age of the complainant's daughter before publication. Given that the subject matter clearly related to the child's welfare, the result was a breach of the Code.

Stephen Abell, Director of the PCC, commented: "Clause 6 of the Editors' Code rightly goes to great lengths to protect children under 16, and prevents children from being interviewed on issues involving their welfare without the consent of a custodial parent. Given the nature of the quoted comments, the newspaper should have sought to make further enquiries before publication, and in particular established the age of the child concerned. This ruling should remind editors of the importance of the strict provisions of the Code as they relate to a child's welfare".

ENDS

Notes to editors:

1. To read the adjudication, which was published on the newspaper's website today, please click [here](#).
2. The Managing Editor of Newsquest North and East London which publishes the Wanstead and Woodford Guardian, Anthony Longden, is an editorial member of the Commission. In line with the Commission's usual procedures when the title of one of its members is subject to a complaint, Mr Longden took no part in the PCC's deliberations in this case, and left the room when it was discussed. He did not see any correspondence connected to the matter.
3. For more information, please contact Jonathan Collett on 020 7438 1246 or 07740 896805.

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