

# Charity Commission takes regulatory action against trustees who mismanaged Newark charity

Press release

The Charity Commission has secured voluntary undertakings from three trustees of Hope House School.



The Charity Commission has secured voluntary undertakings from 3 trustees of Hope House School, ensuring that they will not act as charity trustees for a period of at least 8 years. The regulator's action follows investigations into the trustees' misconduct and/or mismanagement of the Newark-based charity.

Hope House School is a charity-run independent school, catering for approximately 25 pupils with special educational needs. The charity aims to advance the education of children between the ages of 5 and 19 years old who suffer from neurological and psychological conditions such as, but not limited to, Opltz syndrome, Autistic Spectrum Disorders and Dyspraxia.

The Commission opened a statutory inquiry into Hope House School in October 2017. This inquiry followed a compliance case opened in 2016 to assess anonymous complaints that a trustee (trustee A), was receiving personal benefit from the charity. This benefit included designer handbags and holidays to New York and Belgium. Trustee A was also the school's founder and Principal.

In an assessment of the charity's banking information, the Commission also identified suspicious payments made to trustee A's husband, as well as wider concerns about how spending was in line with the charity's purposes. This prompted a statutory inquiry, which was concluded today.

[The inquiry](#) found multiple instances of misconduct and/or mismanagement, including that:

- trustee A was able to breach internal financial controls and make payments to her husband
- the payment of the rent and utility bills of a flat for a former beneficiary were not in furtherance of the charity's objects, and constituted a misapplication of charity funds
- trips to New York and Belgium, made by trustee A's family members to accompany pupils, and the purchase of personal luxury items, constituted personal benefit
- the current trustees did not act to adequately address concerns identified by Ofsted, and did not take all of the appropriate steps to improve the school's safeguarding practices and training, risk assessments, or health and safety

**Amy Spiller, Head of Investigations at the Charity Commission, said:**

Cases like this demonstrate the importance of good governance, robust internal financial controls and responsible trustee oversight. Trustee A abused their position and other trustees' neglect of their duties allowed this misconduct to continue unchecked, to the detriment of the charity and its beneficiaries.

The public expects trustees to deliver the charity's objects and ensure it makes a tangible and positive impact in the community. It is disappointing that these trustees did not take that duty and their responsibilities seriously.

As part of the inquiry, the regulator appointed an interim manager who improved the charity's financial position and helped ensure it could continue in its work to provide an education for children with special needs.

The Commission worked with Ofsted and the Department for Education to ensure trustees were taking seriously their responsibilities to rectify concerns raised by Ofsted on the safeguarding of beneficiaries and the effective ongoing operation of the charity.

**Notes to Editors**

1. The Charity Commission is the independent, non-ministerial government department that registers and regulates charities in England and Wales. Its purpose is to ensure charity can thrive and inspire trust so that people can improve lives and strengthen society.
2. The voluntary undertaking made by the former trustees commenced in 2019.
3. The full report can be viewed [here](#).

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