

Teachers at London school resign en masse following school inspection

Tania Kent
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The entire staff of a London junior school, including the head teacher and deputy, resigned last week in an unprecedented protest over a report by the government's school inspection body.

Inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) had criticised Moor Lane Junior School in Chessington, southwest London as having “serious weakness” in April last year. Under rules introduced by the Labour government, schools found to be failing by Ofsted inspectors have a limited period of time to make good. When inspectors returned last month they told head teacher Jane Wright that insufficient progress had been made.

A statement by Kingston Local Education Authority (LEA), responsible for education provision in the area, said, “Teaching staff considered that their efforts over the past 12 months had not been recognised in the progress report and consequently the remaining staff tendered their resignations”. Chairman of the school's governors John Heamon said the school had been “wrecked” by the decision. Parents were informed of the resignations by the authority last Monday and all the staff are to leave at the end of the current school term in July. The head teacher is taking early retirement. The deputy head and five other teachers have found jobs elsewhere.

An Ofsted spokesman denied any responsibility for the school's resulting crisis. Attacking the teaching staff, he said that the “unfortunate” resignations were “clearly a matter for them and their consciences and it's something that the governors and the LEA are going to have to address.”

In the same week as the Kingston resignations, 23 out of 55 teachers at Kingswood High School in Hull handed in their notice. Kingswood is designated a “fresh start” school, having been officially deemed as

“failed” and shut down following Ofsted inspections and then reopened under a new regime. The teachers complained that they were unable to cope with the workload being forced upon them.

These cases underscore the widespread anger and hostility towards Ofsted inspections, which is leading to suicides, depression and high stress levels amongst teachers and pupils alike.

The character of Ofsted inspections is not shaped, as the Blair government claims, by a noble desire to reach “higher standards”. There is no genuine examination of the particular problems facing schools, such as underfunding and overcrowding, much less the allocation of extra finance and resources to increase staff levels and meet children's needs, especially those from poor and deprived backgrounds. There has been a vast increase in teaching workloads, and administrative duties. But poor results are placed entirely at the door of teaching staff.

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The establishment of Ofsted by the previous Conservative government was part of a market-oriented approach to education, now fully embraced by Labour. The inspections it carries out are meant to facilitate the government's creeping privatisation of the comprehensive state education system.

Ofsted started statutory inspections of all LEAs in England approximately 30 months ago, and has now visited 75, around half the total. Ofsted inspectors are part of teams operated by private contractors. When they find a school to be “failing”, it can be closed by the Secretary of State for Education and then taken over, often by the same contractors that failed it. Contractors then charge exorbitant sums for consultancy fees and the tendering out of school

services.

Companies that are offering services to schools and colleges are stock market high flyers. The sector has grown at 30 percent per annum over the last few years and is expected to expand still further as the Labour government contracts out entire LEAs to private companies. The government has now recommended intervention in a total of 15 LEAs, including large urban authorities such as Leeds. It recently extended its list of approved consultants and providers in anticipation of the need for further action.



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