

Business leader selected as new chair of UK schools inspectorate

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The appointment last week of businessman David Hoare as the new chair of the UK schools inspectorate Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) will see an escalation of the government's Academies agenda—the privatisation of state education—and further rich pickings for private capital.

In announcing the appointment, Nicky Morgan, the new Conservative Party Education Minister who replaced the much hated Michael Gove last month, said, “Mr Hoare is a proven business leader who has the expertise in leadership and governance crucial to helping Ofsted through a significant period of change and reform”.

The expertise being lauded does not rest on any teaching background. Hoare has never been a teacher or worked as an educator. His experience in the state education system is virtually non-existent. He was educated at Marlborough, one of the UK's most expensive public schools. From there, he studied engineering at Birmingham University, then business at Stanford.

In fact, his limited experience in the education sector is as the director of AET (Academies Enterprise Trust), which controls around 60 academy schools. The AET trust has been banned by the government from taking on new schools due to concerns about its performance. Hoare will leave AET to take up the Ofsted job in September. At around the same time, Ofsted will issue a report that is expected to criticise some of AET's schools following inspections carried out just before the summer break.

Hoare was also academies ambassador for the Department for Education.

Beyond this, his experience is exclusively as a business manager. In 1977, he started work at the European arm of the US consultancy Bain & Company.

Ten years later, he co-founded Talisman Management, which advises firms in need of “restructuring”. He has led numerous underperforming firms, including Laura Ashley in the late 1990s, after its disastrous US expansion triggered four profit warnings. He also served on the boards of Paragon Group, the buy-to-let lender forced to stop lending during the financial crisis, and Target Express, the Irish logistics group that was sold to CityLink.

Hoare is chairman of logistics company DX Group, overseeing its £200 million flotation on AIM, London's junior stock market, this year. He is also the founding director of Duncton, rebranded as Moneybarn, which provides high interest car finance to people with poor credit.

His business experience is based on a “slash and burn” policy—taking over failing enterprises, sacking workers, imposing cuts and restructuring work practices.

The appointment has been sold as a “compromise” choice by the government following criticisms by the Labour Party and the coalition Liberal Democrats that Gove did not renew the contract of Labour peer Sally Morgan, Ofsted chair.

David Ross, co-founder of the Carphone Warehouse and founder of a chain of 25 academies, was the favoured candidate of the Conservatives, on a short list of four names for the Ofsted job drawn up by an independent panel. But the multi-millionaire was dropped after Liberal Democrat objections that he had donated about £220,000 to the Conservative Party.

Tristram Hunt, Labour's shadow Education Secretary, had complained that Tory “cronism” was undermining Ofsted's “independence.”

This is fallacious. Far from Ofsted being politically independent, it is the mechanism through which the

government's agenda of privatisation has taken place, both under the Labour government and the coalition.

The teaching unions, who have opposed any mobilisation against the assault on education and teachers conditions, have issued mealy-mouthed statements to the new chair to act "fairly".

Kevin Courtney, deputy general secretary of the National Union of Teachers said, "Academy status is no panacea. It is essential that Ofsted distances itself from the pressure to force schools to become academies against their will."

It was Labour's Sally Morgan who oversaw the unprecedented acceleration of privatisation, which today has resulted in 57 percent of all English state secondary schools being converted to academies.

Academy status is a smokescreen for the abolition of state funding of schools in order to turn education, as with all other vital public services, over to big business to fleece.

Despite the fact that there is little evidence of the success of academies and Free Schools, partly due to the fact that the government will not allow scrutiny of their performance, the speed of academisation has been unrelenting.

The limited studies available reveal that they have not been able to resolve "underperformance" by disadvantaged schools and have exacerbated the difficulties faced by these students.

The Sutton Trust education charity, found that almost half the academy chains it surveyed failed to do better than mainstream local authority schools in getting their disadvantaged pupils to obtain five A* (A-star) to C grade passes at GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) including maths and English.

The research, by Professors Merryn Hutchings and Becky Francis, and Dr Robert de Vries, concludes, "There are also some chains which are highly ineffective across a range of measures and which are failing to improve the prospects of disadvantaged pupils."

The researchers studied the chains' results on GCSEs, the percentage of pupils taking the English Baccalaureate, and how much they had improved pupils' performance since arriving at their secondary schools at 11.

Performance was worst in the English Baccalaureate, under which pupils are expected to get top-grade passes

at GCSE in English, maths, a language, the sciences and a humanities subject (History and Geography).

One of the factors will be the use of unqualified teachers employed in academies as a cheap option, without the necessary skills and qualifications to support the needs of the children for whom they work with. Gove overturned the rules on employing unqualified teachers in academies and Free Schools in 2012.

Across the country, the number of unqualified teachers working in English schools is nine percent higher than in 2011-12, up from 17,084 to 18,601.

That Hoare was the director of a chain of failing academies will not be of any concern to the government. Its intention is not to provide a better quality of education to students but to free the state of any obligation to educate children and transform it into solely a for-profit enterprise. In this aim, Hoare is a more than worthy candidate.



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