

RACIALISED GEOGRAPHIES, WHITE SAVIOURS
AND URBAN FRONTIERS: EXAMINING THE
GROWTH AND ESTABLISHMENT OF ENGLISH
“NO EXCUSES” SCHOOLS WITH CRITICAL RACE
THEORY

by

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Abstract

“No excuses” schooling is a recent US policy import that has become established in England. Promoted by policymakers for its promise of greater academic achievement and closing racial achievement gaps, “no excuses” is characterised by conspicuously high academic standards and strict behaviour codes. However, critics challenge “no excuses” for its narrow view of educational purpose and harmful outcomes such as its association with disproportionate racial discipline and exclusion rates.

This study uses Critical Race Theory (CRT) to explore the growth and establishment of “no excuses” in England and its relationship to race. It adopts a mixed-methods design that deploys the complementary tools of QuantCrit, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Critical Policy Analysis (CPA). First, I examine school census data for 74 eligible sample “no excuses” schools using QuantCrit principles. Then, with CDA and CPA, I analyse qualitative texts from the DfE’s website that reference “no excuses”.

After comparing the 74 sample “no excuses” schools with their Local Authority and regional counterparts, I find a geographically racialised pattern reinforced through the DfE’s frequent references to ‘urban’ discourses in their website texts. Using Critical Policy Analysis principles, I argue that the DfE’s ostensibly colour-evasive ‘urban’ and ‘poverty’ discourses rhetoric might function as dog whistles to the White hegemonic alliance identified by Allen, and that this is reinforced by

the DfE's rendering of "no excuses" policymakers and policy actors as tough but benevolent White saviours.

Finally, using an interdisciplinary geographical lens, I argue that "no excuses" functions as part of a racial imagining of the urban as a missionary frontier; "no excuses" strong geographical orientation serves Whiteness by spatially constituting a racialised policy problem for its crusading, quasi-religious "no excuses" solution.

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List of Abbreviations

ASCL	Association of School and College Leaders
BAME	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CMO	Charter Management Organisation
CPA	Critical Policy Analysis
CRT	Critical Race Theory
DfE	Department for Education
EAL	English as an Additional Language
ELA	English, Language and Arts
FSM	Free School Meals (eligibility)
IDACI	Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index
IMD	Index of Multiple Deprivation
IoD	Indices of Deprivation
KIPP	Knowledge is Power Program
LA	Local Authority
LSOA	Lower Layer Super Output Area
MAT	Multi Academy Trust
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government
MSOA	Middle Layer Super Output Area
OfS	Office for Students
ONS	Office of National Statistics
SD	Standard Deviation
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
TF	Teach First
TfA	Teach for America
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In England, “no excuses” schools are on the rise. With strong advocates in government (e.g. Gove, 2010a; 2012; Gibb, 2016a) and in wider policy discourse (e.g. Birbalsingh, 2016; Bennett, 2018; Lightfoot, 2020), this model of schooling has attracted a large amount of praise and opprobrium. Its proponents highlight its impressive academic results (Angrist, Pathak and Walters, 2010; Tuttle *et al*, 2010; Gove, 2010a; 2012; Tuttle *et al*, 2015), while its detractors highlight its damaging outcomes, which are disproportionately racialised (Miron, Urschel and Saxon, 2011; Torres, 2014; Golann, 2015; Losen *et al*, 2016; Nichols-Barrer *et al*, 2016). Indeed, despite originating in the US (Skiba and Peterson, 1999), US media looks upon the English expression of “no excuses” with interest, simultaneously inspired by our rise of ‘super strict schools’ (Bubola, 2024) while noting the softening of the model’s harsh sloganeering (Mathews, 2020).

While “no excuses” has become a more salient feature of the English education policy landscape, there is a pressing need to explore its growth, impacts, and assumptions. In this chapter, I will first define “no excuses” before setting the model into the context of its international translation from the US. Then, I will outline some of “no excuses” key controversies before briefly sketching the themes and structure of this thesis.

1.2 What is “no excuses”?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, because “no excuses” was conceived in the US, its most prevalent definitions take a US perspective. One of the earliest definitions was Carter’s (2000) ‘Seven Common Traits of High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools’ (p. 8):

1. Principals must be free.
2. Principals use measurable goals to establish a culture of achievement.
3. Master teachers bring out the best in a faculty.
4. Rigorous and regular testing leads to continuous student achievement.
5. Achievement is the key to discipline.
6. Principals work actively with parents to make the home a centre of learning.
7. Effort creates ability.

In this definition, Carter emphasises achievement as the model’s primary purpose, with rigour, discipline and effort as the key ingredients.

These themes have been intensified into more recent definitions. Cheng *et al*’s (2017) definition operationalises core characteristics in their “no excuses” meta-analysis:

No Excuses charter schools have conspicuously high academic expectations. No Excuses charter schools often embrace a college-going culture — that is, they intently socialise and instil the goal of attending college into their students, many of whom would be the first in their families to do so. No Excuses charter schools also feature strict behaviour codes, extended instructional time, and targeted instruction (e.g., tutoring) for low-performing students. (p. 210)

Here, Cheng *et al* afford 'strict behaviour codes' and 'expectations' much greater salience, a pattern picked up by Golann and Torres' (2018) definition focusing exclusively on discipline. They refer to what they call the '4Cs':

Comprehensiveness: programs that pervade every behaviour for every member of the school community;

Clarity: the articulation of concrete, specific behavioural expectations;

Consistency — the strict following of school systems that makes no allowance for discretion;

Consequences — both positive and negative. (After Golann and Torres, 2018, pp. 4-5)

This overt disciplinary orientation is also apparent in how “no excuses” schools and staff recognise their practices. For example, in early US “no excuses” research of 300 principals of Charter Management Organisations (CMO), 95% ‘[c]onsistently enforced schoolwide behavioural standards and discipline policies’ and 74% required students and parents to sign responsibility agreements (Furgeson *et al*, 2011, p. 30). “No excuses” organisations on both sides of the Atlantic also proudly advertise their strict behaviour practices. The US’ ‘Knowledge is Power Program’ (KIPP), for example, valorises the strict, almost masochistic nature of their disciplinary practices (Lack, 2009; Horn, 2010), while the UK’s Ark Schools overtly express their “no excuses” culture (e.g. Ark Schools, 2014; Ark Globe Academy, 2024; Ark Isaac Newton Academy, 2024) and their demand for ‘exemplary behaviour’ (Ark Greenwich Free School, 2024).

1.2.1 The origins of “no excuses”

The definitions above indicate “no excuses” explicit concern with discipline and academic achievement. The model’s origin offers other critical insights into its deeper purposes.

Before it arrived in the education policy landscape, the central logic of “no excuses” was present in Wilson and Kelling’s (1982) ‘broken windows’ approach, where policymakers assumed that if they police minor misdemeanours harshly, more serious crimes were less likely. This was introduced into schools under the guise of “zero tolerance”, which purported to protect students from harm and violence from drugs and weapons (Zweifler and De Beers, 2002). This approach

then extended into schools' wider approaches to behaviour management (Skiba and Peterson, 1999; Greene, 2014; Golann, 2015). As such, harsh disciplinary practices are emblematic of the wider move toward processes and discourses of criminalisation which currently pervade schools (e.g. Monroe, 2005; Hirschfield, 2008; Piro, 2008; Skiba *et al*, 2014; Ramey, 2015; Nijjar, 2021; Sevon, 2022; Cushing, 2022; 2023a; 2023b).

This shift toward criminalising has developed into broader narratives of deficit and chaos, further fuelling the spread of “no excuses”. “Zero tolerance” and the broken windows logic developed into a warrant to ‘sweat the small stuff’ (Whitman, 2008; Cullen, 2016; Golann, Debs and Weiss, 2019) and target any infringement of behavioural expectations, even if they are minor (Golann and Torres, 2018; Goodman, 2013). In England, such an approach is legitimised by crisis narratives of low-level disruption and poor student discipline (Ofsted, 2014; Graham, 2017; Cushing, 2022). This policy warrant dovetails with the core “no excuses” rationale that learning time is a student’s most valuable commodity and that losing even a moment of this time to address disruptive or off-task behaviour jeopardises academic achievement (e.g. Carter, 2000; Thernstrom and Thernstrom, 2004; Whitman, 2008). Such narratives pejoratively position students as being culturally deficient and surrounded by chaotic lives, crucial features in the public discourse behind “no excuses” expansion in the US (e.g. Thernstrom and Thernstrom, 2004) and England (e.g. Birbalsingh, 2016; Graham, 2017; Kulz, 2019).

1.2.2 “No excuses” racial origins

Race is prominent in “no excuses” growth and establishment. While uncharted in England, the US growth of “no excuses” is a predominantly urban phenomenon, keeping with these deficit narratives. In these inner-city areas, “no excuses” schools serve high populations of Black or Latinx students, especially those with low socioeconomic status (Goodman, 2013; Sondel, 2016). In the UK, we know that urban populations are more likely to have higher proportions of people of colour (Mirza and Warwick, 2022; Defra, 2023). Therefore, we may assume that if English “no excuses” was similarly focused on the urban, this would likely have a similarly racialised character.

Such racialised populations are also often cited as a primary reason for “no excuses” in the US: proponents openly profess a desire to close the racial achievement gap between Black, Latinx and White students (Carter, 2000; Thernstrom and Thernstrom, 2004; Whitman, 2008). Similarly, this discourse is a prominent feature of the English policy landscape. For example, former government ministers Michael Gove (2010b; 2012b) and Nick Gibb (2010a) cite the attainment gap as a core driver, as does Katherine Birbalsingh, head of the flagship “no excuses” Michaela Community School and self-styled as ‘Britain’s Strictest Headteacher’ (Adams, 2016; Birbalsingh, 2024). Additionally, the Ark multi-academy trust (MAT) argues that ‘ensuring every child has access to an excellent education is an important way to help tackle social inequality’, stating they are ‘proud of [their] record on narrowing the achievement gap and widening opportunities’ (Ark Schools, 2024).

Even where poverty is cited as a key driver for “no excuses”, race is still a key issue. For example, Carter’s (2000) progenitor text emphasises ‘high poverty’ — featuring prominently in his book’s subtitle — and race, and Whitman (2008) also regularly links poverty and race in his book. Even where we might come across citations of poverty in English “no excuses” policy discourses (e.g. Gove, 2010a; Morgan, 2016), we can still read race. We know that ‘Black and minority ethnic people are 2.5 times more likely to be in poverty than white people’ (Edminstron, Begum and Kataria, 2022, p. 2). We also know that ‘[d]espite only making up around 15% of the population in the UK, more than a quarter (26%) of those in ‘deep poverty’ (i.e. more than 50% below the poverty line) are from minority ethnic background and make up a growing share of those on the lowest incomes’ (p.2). Others have calculated similar results (IRRE, 2023; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2024). Thus, poverty in “no excuses” discourse — even when devoid of overt racial discourses — is an undeniably racial issue.

1.3 **Recontextualising “no excuses”**

While the English “no excuses” originates with the US and many of its discourses, it does not follow that England’s growth and expression of “no excuses” will be the same. In this section, we will explore the key similarities and differences between the two that become apparent when exploring how the model was recontextualised from one to the other.

1.3.1 How did the US “no excuses” model come to England?

In the US, “no excuses” is very closely linked to the charter school movement, which allowed for clusters of schools with a distinctly corporate character (Sondel, 2015a; 2015b; 2016; Golann, 2015; 2021). The rigidity of the high expectations and strict behaviour codes (Cheng *et al*, 2017; Golann and Torres, 2018) for pupils apply equally to teachers and leaders who are evaluated through their adherence to these practices (Torres, 2014; 2016b; 2016c; Sondel, 2015a; 2015b; 2016; Golann, 2021). This not only made the codification of “no excuses” practices possible, but also enabled the scalability desired by “no excuses” CMO leaders (Carter, 2000; Tuttle *et al*, 2015; Sondel, 2016; Golann, 2021).

While their proliferation in the US is both extensive and rapid, “no excuses” schools often meet resistance from local residents, especially when they threaten to supplant existing schools (Offutt-Chaney, 2019; Benson, 2022; Enoch-Stevens *et al*, 2022; Hernández, 2022; Jabbar *et al*, 2022). Thus, policymakers and CMO leaders employ tactics such as engaging in the rhetoric of market reforms (Offutt-Chaney, 2019), reifying ‘lines of power’ and locally circulating ‘disparaging narratives about minoritised groups’ (Hernández, 2022, p. 23), racialising target populations (Jabbar *et al*, 2022); employing ‘managerialist authorising styles that leave little room for participation from the Black and low-income school community’ (Enoch-Stevens *et al*, 2022, p. 1) and characterising charter schools and their traditional counterparts as innovative and ‘dropout factories’ respectively (Benson, 2022, p. 106). While “no excuses” CMOs are often awarded higher levels of civic funding than their traditional counterparts (Lack, 2009; Ferguson *et al*, 2012; Hernández, 2022) — simultaneously sweetening the

transition and making “no excuses” success more likely (Horn, 2010; Miron, Urschel and Saxton, 2011; Torres and Golann, 2018; Offutt-Chaney, 2019; Benson, 2022) — in New Orleans, Hurricane Katrina provided the perfect policy lever for wholesale, hostile takeovers of traditional schools in displaced, vulnerable communities (Buras, 2011; Dixson, Buras and Jeffers, 2015; Sondel, 2016; Offutt-Chaney, 2019). Thus, “no excuses” became a core component of US urban renewal policy, where corporate CMOS achieved near ubiquitous status (Horn, 2010; Benson, 2022).

Despite shared origins with the US, the inception and growth of English “no excuses” schools have followed a different path. While the Hurricane Katrina disaster afforded an immediate policy warrant for urban school renewal (Buras, 2011; Dixson, Buras and Jeffers, 2015; Sondel, 2016; Offutt-Chaney, 2019), in England, the warrant is located within the school system itself in the guise of a low-level disruption and behaviour crisis (Ofsted, 2014; Graham, 2017; Cushing, 2022). Post-COVID, this warrant has been adapted to include a sense that school rigidity and structure may overcome some of the stringent pandemic response’s worst effects on our children (Puttick, 2023; Korbey, 2024; Pondiscio, 2024). For example, the previous head of Ofsted, Amanda Spielman (Weale, 2023a), urges that ‘[c]lear rules and expectations, consistently applied, and with known consequences for breaking them, are, of course, an important element of a proven approach’. In her justification, it is not just children’s learning at stake, but that ‘poor behaviour can make other children anxious about school’.

The rise of MATs — broadly analogous to US CMOs (West and Yanghi, 2024) — has also allowed for “no excuses” to flourish. As noted earlier, the heavily codified practices of the model are perfect for — and justified through — corporate scalability. English “no excuses” proponents have leaned in hard to this aspect of the model. Conservative government ministers such as Gove (2012a; 2012b) and Gibb (2016a; 2016b) regularly eulogise about “no excuses” in the same breath they eulogise about the freedoms of MATs. And just as MATs are billed as being the school structure of choice for leaders seeking to make their mark and disrupt the status quo of what they perceive as English educational malaise, “no excuses” is the new, fashionable, ostensibly evidence-based tool to wield (Gove, 2010b; 2012a; Gibb, 2015; 2016a; 2016b). In this way, the US and English “no excuses” share aspects of their policy networks. However, the recontextualisation between the US and England entails a wider range of similarities and differences, a point we will explore in the next section.

1.3.2 [Recontextualised similarities and differences](#)

While policymakers and actors often transport policies between national boundaries (Robertson and Dale, 2015; Ball, 2016), ‘[p]olicies will mutate and morph during their journeys’ becoming recontextualised and semantically altered (Peck and Theodore, 2010, p. 170). The reemphasis of the policy warrant detailed above is illustrative of that shift. According to Maguire *et al* (2011), schools produce but are also *constituted by* the discourses, discursive practices, texts and events within these policies and their warrants. These discourses are described by Foucault (1986, pp. 208-209) as ‘the set of conditions in accordance with which a practice is exercised, in accordance with which that practice gives

rise to partially or totally new statements, and in accordance with which it can be modified'. Thus, discourses define policies, and policies define 'the rules of the game' (Ball, 1993); they define how teachers, leaders, pupils and parents can legitimately act (Offe, 1984, p. 106; Ball, 1993).

Within a school, though, policy on paper and policy in practice can be quite different (Braun, Maguire and Ball, 2010; Ball, 2015). Even when a policy is mandated top-down, it 'is translated, adjusted and worked on differently by diverse sets of policy actors' (Maguire *et al*, 2011, p. 153). This has been shown to be the case in an English secondary school (Maguire *et al*, 2011), but also specifically in US "no excuses" schools (Torres, 2014; 2019; Golann, 2015; 2021; Golann and Jones, 2021; James-Gallaway, 2022). This throws a shadow over the 'consistency' element of Golann and Torres' (2018) definition of "no excuses".

Another barrier to a pure translation of "no excuses" to England is the Equality Act (2010). This legally obliges a school to make 'reasonable adjustments' to 'all aspects of the school day' for disabled children, 'including attendance and behaviour, so that everyone is set high expectations and feels they belong in the school community' (DfE, 2023). Thus, "no excuses" demand for consistency, with its exclusionary impact in the US (Sullivan, Larke and Webb-Hasan, 2010; Hoffman, 2014; Losen *et al*, 2016) and England (Kulz, 2013) falls foul of the Equality Act and the DfE's reading of it, even if only in spirit. Thus, if English schools adopt a "no excuses" approach, they must recontextualise it to be legally compliant. However, England's strictest adherents to "no excuses" — the flagship "no excuses" Michaela Community School led by Britain's Strictest Headteacher

(Adams, 2016; Birbalsingh, 2024) — profess their extreme consistency as being able to erase special needs labels; in one vignette, they describe a child with severe behavioural issues who appeared to develop conformity as a result of the school's immovable behaviour practices. They even go so far as to say having 'different standards for different pupils' is 'profoundly wrong' (Porter, 2016, p. 69). However, the opprobrium Michaela and its staff have received for this view (Kidd, 2016a; 2016b; Francis, 2017) illustrates that it does not hold much currency outside Michaela's walls.

By placing an upper legal ceiling of 'consistency', the Equality Act (2010) enforces nationally standardised recontextualisation limits, although English schools still have much scope. For example, in one of the unpublished assignments for the taught component of this EdD (Whittaker, 2018), I examined the behaviour policies and websites of two overtly "no excuses" primary schools using Critical Discourse Analysis. I found that these schools emphasised different aspects of the "no excuses" discourse: one promoted the primacy of organisational structure over individual, pupil-level agency; the other used the "no excuses" slogan to mark their extraordinariness (Braun, Maguire and Ball, 2010) despite the behaviour policy being devoid of Golann and Torres' (2018) 4Cs. In these two cases alone, the range of recontextualisation is vast, even before we consider how they are enacted (Maguire *et al*, 2011).

Thus far, we have explored the recontextualisation of "no excuses" at national, legal, local school, and teacher enactment levels. What of international influences? Where policies are recontextualised across national boundaries, they

are often courted through reference to quantifiable evidence (Lingard, 2011) and perceptions of success (Peck and Theodore, 2010; Lingard, 2011; Ball, 2016). For this to happen, key individuals and organisations must mobilise these ideas, and this relies on policy networks (Ball and Exley, 2010; Ball, 2016). A key example of this is within teacher training. The US's Teach for America (TfA) scheme overtly seeks to attract the best graduates and train them for urban schools (Crawford-Garrett and Thomas, 2018; Elliot, 2018; Rauschenberger, 2020). Many of these teachers end up working in "no excuses" schools (Golann, 2015; 2021; Sondel, 2016; Torres, 2016a), which align with their paradoxically deficit-laden, meritocratic views on social justice. England's Teach First (TF) program, which similarly seeks to attract the most successful graduates and prepare them for work in urban, "deprived" schools (Elliot, 2018; Rauschenberger, 2020), also shares the same organisation and individual views of social justice. These graduates often feature prominently in both US and UK policy networks. For example, TfA alumni Mike Feinberg and David Levin founded KIPP, and TF developed an initiative called 'Policy First' for its alumni to influence education policy (Rauschenberger, 2020). Thus, these organisations inculcate and nurture wide and strong networks that influence and shape educational policy and practices, with "no excuses" in particular flourishing at their hands (Crawford-Garrett and Thomas, 2018).

Indeed, these policy networks are an important part of policy creation and adoption, and thus recontextualisation. For Ball and Exley (2010), these policy networks 'join-up government, think tanks and some individual interlockers, who straddle sectors and policy fields and settings' (p. 151). "No excuses" have been

influenced by such policy agents. The Sutton Trust — an organisation that ‘champions social mobility through programmes, research and policy influence’ (Sutton Trust, 2024) — promotes “no excuses” and KIPP as an ‘international best practice’ (Sutton Trust, 2010a, p. 15) in their ‘Mobility Manifesto’, calculating a 27:1 cost-benefit ratio (p. 6) for their role in ‘piloting’ and ‘developing ‘no-excuses’/KIPP schools in the UK’ (p. 7). Bringing “no excuses” to England was a key part of their desire ‘to think much more radically to address low levels of education mobility and learn lessons from overseas’ (Sutton Trust, 2010b, p. 25). Another policy influencer is Tom Bennett — England’s behaviour tsar — who advocates for strict behaviour policies, including “no excuses” (Bennett, 2018; Lightfoot, 2020). Indeed, the recontextualisation process is alive in Tom’s discourses as in one article, he argues that ‘[w]hat schools mean by the zero-tolerance slogan is that they have a very low tolerance for misbehaviour or disobeying rules’ (Lightfoot, 2020). In another, he attempts to disentangle “no excuses” and exclusions, arguing that ‘[z]ero tolerance is a red herring’ and that ‘[f]ar from zero-tolerance behaviour policies being a problem, when schools sweat the small stuff — offer clear guidance on good conduct, insist on calm, civil spaces, and help students feel valued as members of their school community — the need to exclude goes down’ (Bennett, 2018). By Bennett’s admission, the policy is ‘frequently criticised for being too inflexible and inhumane’, illustrating how “no excuses” has been imported to England despite not being a natural fit. His acknowledgement of inhumanity raises other questions: what are the impacts of “no excuses”, and how might they manifest in England?

1.4 “No excuses” and racialised outcomes

In Chapter Two, I will explore the harms of “no excuses” in more detail. However, because we have so far started to argue that “no excuses” is a racialised phenomenon, it is germane to this introduction to briefly outline those harms — heavily racialised as they are — now.

In the previous section, we briefly set the scene for the deficit discourses of “no excuses” target populations. A secondary aim of the model is to inculcate models of character development in its children: character education is core to the KIPP ethos (Ellison, 2012; Goodman, 2013; Dishon and Goodman, 2017) and features heavily in Michaela’s ‘Battle Hymn of the Tiger Teachers’ (Birbalsingh, 2016). Drawing on psychological concepts such as grit (Duckworth *et al*, 2007) and ‘learned optimism’ (Seligman, 2006), “no excuses” schools employ these evidence-based techniques to prepare — ostensibly at least — their students for the world (Horn, 2010; Ellison, 2012; Ellison and Iqtadar, 2020).

However, the strict nature of US “no excuses” disciplinary practices often achieves counter-productive outcomes. For example, they lead to diminished self-esteem and motivation, internalised narratives of shame and distrust of their own abilities (Goodman and Uzon, 2013; Dishon and Goodman, 2017; Goodman, 2017). Perhaps most counterproductive to “no excuses” aims is that “no excuses” students are more apt to *learned helplessness* than learned optimism (Horn, 2010) and are often psychologically and emotionally ill-equipped for college success (Golann, 2015; 2021). While these harms are not racialised *prima facie*,

if we recall that the target populations in the US and England (through their poverty discourses) *are* racialised, these psychological harms will be disproportionately racially skewed. This raises further questions: is there more to the target populations than the Department for Education (DfE) overtly professes, and does the English geographical spread of “no excuses” match this rhetoric? Again, US perspectives offer some valid starting points for this endeavour.

First, we already know that US “no excuses” is a predominantly urban phenomenon and particularly impacts US students of colour in these regions (e.g. Horn, 2010; Kee, 2015; Golann, Debs and Weiss, 2019; Waitoller, Nguyen and Super, 2019; Golann, 2021; Trenton-Marsh and Walker, 2022). The US exclusionary data also has a racialised character: “no excuses” and its harsh disciplinary practices lead to disproportionate rates of exclusion amongst students of colour (e.g. Sullivan, Larke and Webb-Hasan, 2010; Hoffman, 2014; Losen *et al*, 2016; Skiba, Fergus and Gregory, 2023). For Skiba, Fergus and Gregory (2023), these exclusionary disparities ‘represent a key component of structural racism’ (p. 215). This is explored in more detail in Chapter Two. While we do not know the extent of racialised exclusion in English “no excuses” schools, we have evidence that UK and English exclusion is a racialised practice in general (Timpson, 2019; Gillborn *et al*, 2021; Stewart-Hall, Langham and Miller, 2023). Thus, we might reasonably raise concerns about the growth of “no excuses” on our already racialised exclusion rates in light of the US evidence: might “no excuses” exacerbate an already entrenched systemic issue? If so, policymakers must understand if this is the case, which students are impacted by

it, and upon which grounds this is happening. Only then can we attempt to challenge any racialised harms of English “no excuses”.

This study asks and attempts to answer these questions. To do so, we will employ Critical Race Theory (CRT) — explored substantially in Chapter Two — an important theoretical perspective that holds that racism is so ingrained into society it is effectively hidden (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Gillborn, 2006b; Rollock and Gillborn, 2011). If organisations such as the Sutton Trust, Ark Schools and the DfE promote “no excuses” under the guise of social justice, but the policy itself damages their claim, we are dutybound as citizens and educational researchers to challenge critically such injustices, including the grounds on which these injustices are justified and perpetuated. That is the aim of this thesis. However, because racism is so naturalised and taken for granted, we will need appropriate tools to get under the surface of “no excuses” growth and establishment. CRT provides a range of such tools which will prove invaluable, such as QuantCrit, which allows researchers to look beyond the seemingly neutral and objective generation and presentation of statistics (Garcia, López, and Vélez, 2018; Gillborn, Warmington, and Demack, 2018; D’Costa *et al.*, 2023). In addition, Critical Policy Analysis (CPA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (both explored in Chapter Three) offer further tools that dovetail with CRT to examine the way “no excuses” is presented and functions.

1.5 Thesis structure

The structure of this thesis is as follows. **Chapter Two** explores the extensive but mostly US-oriented literature on “no excuses” in general terms and where it relates specifically to race. Then, it examines CRT in the context of this study, paying particular attention to the key tenets of White supremacy and the centrality of racism before considering the role of both in education policy and practice. I introduce the research questions at the end of this chapter.

Chapter Three outlines this study’s research methodology in two parts: in theory and in practice. The ‘methodology in theory’ section explicates the theoretical underpinnings of CRT and the specific tools I employ to challenge the data, namely CPA, CDA and QuantCrit. These are presented in relation to each research question. Because I am taking a mixed-methods approach, this chapter also explores the tensions between qualitative and quantitative data in CRT. I conclude the chapter by explaining the method in practice and how I collected and analysed the data in relation to these tools and to the research questions.

To subvert positivism and the methods-results-discussion format associated with it, I present my empirical findings and discussions together, contextualising each finding with CRT and its tenets of White supremacy and the centrality of racism. **Chapter Four** is the first of these and is concerned with the first, second and third of the research questions. It first uses QuantCrit to examine the geographical demography of “no excuses” schools, placing the data into context using CPA and CDA analyses of the DfE’s official “no excuses” discourses. In this chapter, I

argue that while the DfE professes colour-evasive, poverty-oriented discourses of “no excuses”, the heavy rhetorical emphasis on the ‘urban’ and the quantifiable racialisation of “no excuses” geographies speak to White supremacy and tacit intentionality.

In **Chapter Five**, I address the first and third research questions by examining the DfE’s “no excuses” rhetoric through the lens of White supremacy. I argue that the DfE present themselves as White saviours and that the quasi-religious proselytising rhetoric and the urban geographies of “no excuses” represent part of a new missionary frontier.

Chapter Six concludes the study by reflecting on the significance and limitations of this study before asking what direction we might take to challenge “no excuses” in policy and practice.

1.5.1 A note on terms

Throughout the text, I envelope “no excuses” in inverted commas or scare quotes to emphasise this term’s contested and problematic nature and denote my scepticism.

For brevity, I often refer to the eligible DfE “no excuses” content described in my methodology in Chapter Three as ‘**the** DfE content’ or ‘**the** DfE articles’.

Finally, I have chosen to capitalise words directly denoting race. This is in line with both contemporary and centuries-old thought, from Du Bois (Du Bois and Eaton, 1996) to the New York Times (Coleman, 2020) and The Atlantic (Appiah, 2020). By doing so, I distinguish racialised Black from chromatic black and recognise the history behind the term's origins.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

As we glimpsed in chapter one, the English recontextualisation of “no excuses” draws on its many US origins, including zero-tolerance, broken policing, and an ostensible desire to close the attainment gap.

In this chapter, we seek to explore the literature used to legitimise and challenge the US and English expressions of “no excuses”. I argue that the “no excuses” literature is constituted by bodies of research at odds with each other in their findings, methods, and assumptions. On the one hand, “no excuses” protagonists and progenitors extend neoliberal narratives of personal responsibility, supplemented with a distinctly positivist focus on quantifiable data and test scores. I argue that these are built on a narrow and limited range of assumptions and research methods. In contrast, I draw heavily on the critical literature, which moves beyond the confines of achievement and problematises “no excuses” from cultural, conceptual, discursive, ethnographic and quantitative studies and analyses. Exploring the former is important so we can establish the *prima facie* case for “no excuses”; only once this is done, I argue, can we adequately challenge it with the latter.

While contextualising “no excuses” in this chapter, we eventually arrive at the brutal, racialised realities of “no excuses”. To examine whether the English

growth of “no excuses” shares a racialisation as brutal as the US’, I introduce Critical Race Theory (CRT), which forms the methodological bedrock upon which this study is built. I make the case that two of CRT’s core tenets — the centrality of racism and White supremacy — are particularly suited to exploring English “no excuses” racialisation before closing the chapter by posing key research questions.

2.2 The impact of “no excuses”

In this section, I draw on literature that specifically focuses on the impact of “no excuses”, both negative and positive, academically and holistically, methodologically and conceptually. In doing so, I make the case — even before I start to collect and interrogate data in this study — that “no excuses” is built on limited foundations and that its multifarious harms and brutalities are heavily, and almost unapologetically, racialised. First, I start with the literature that undergirds “no excuses”, which I argue is US-centric and built on narrow and limited methodological approaches and assumptions. Then, I move on to critical research, which has a much broader range of approaches and begins to consider the English context. In particular, I challenge the neoliberal underpinnings to “no excuses” purpose before constituting “no excuses” in the literature as a racially loaded cultural battleground, replete with harm and brutality.

In constituting the literature this way, I take in a wide range of methodological positions and tools. For example, I start by exploring the positivist quantitative analyses used to promote “no excuses” before challenging these with interpretive

and mixed-methods studies that use ethnography, QuantCrit, geography and spatial analyses, and cultural studies. In the final section, I explore the theoretical approach underpinning this research — Critical Race Theory — and consider its empirical affordances and limits.

2.2.1 Proponents' case for “no excuses”

Many prominent proponents of “no excuses” justify its need through student achievement and closing the racial achievement gap, where Black and other racially marginalised pupils achieve worse than their White counterparts (Carter, 2000; Thernstrom and Thernstrom, 2004; Whitman, 2008). Therefore, examining the research literature on “no excuses” offers an appropriate way to examine the model on its own terms.

2.2.1.a “No excuses” for academic gains

Many studies demonstrate “no excuses” positive impact on academic achievement. Various, researchers have found relatively high effect sizes, which are often indicated through standard deviation (SD), where higher SD values indicate higher impact and where values between 0.19 and 0.44 are considered moderate and values between 0.45 to 0.69 are high (Jones and Netolicky, no date). For example, Angrist *et al* (2010) found that KIPP middle school pupils achieved test scores 0.35 standard deviations higher per year for maths and 0.12 SDs higher per year for English, Languages and Arts (ELA). Tuttle *et al* (2010) found a three-year increase of 0.49 SDs in maths and 0.28

SDs in reading, and Tuttle *et al* (2015) found a two-year impact of 0.18 SDs for reading and 0.24 SDs for maths.

Each of these studies was based on an admissions lottery-based quasi-experimental design, made possible through the common policy of lottery-based admissions into “no excuses” schools (Angrist, Pathak and Walters, 2010; Tuttle *et al*, 2010; Tuttle *et al*, 2015). Because of the random selection in these designs, they are considered less susceptible to selection bias and are thus considered amongst the strongest approaches for conferring causal claims in education (Gopalan, Rosinger and Ahn, 2020). Nevertheless, despite being less secure on these terms, non-random designs have also found increased academic achievement gains. For example, without randomisation, Dobbie and Fryer (2011; 2015) calculated increases of 0.0279 SD general academic gains in one New York school (2015), and 0.16 SD maths and 0.095 SD ELA gains each year in its elementary phase (2011). Fryer (2011) also calculated that implementing ‘five core components of the “No Excuses” recipe [...] — increased time, better human capital, more student-level differentiation, frequent use of data to inform instruction, and a culture of high expectations’ (p. 3) into nine Houston ‘traditional’ schools induced an increase of 0.276 SD and 0.059 SD increase in maths and reading scores, respectively, albeit with Fryer admitting school selection issues.

Systematic reviews and meta-analyses have drawn on these studies and others to come to similar conclusions (for example, Powers (2015) and Krowka, Hadd and Marx (2017)). Still, perhaps the most extensive such study was Cheng *et al*’s (2017) ten-study meta-analysis, which estimated a 0.25 SD a year increase for

maths achievement and 0.17 SD for literacy. They note, however, that racial segregation could be a confounding factor — a factor other than the one being studied which may distort findings (Tulchinsky and Varavikova, 2014) — in their results, despite making the case that:

attending a No Excuses charter school for 1 year closes approximately 25% of the Black-White math achievement gap and approximately 20% of the Black-White literacy achievement gap. A straightforward extrapolation of these results suggests that attending a No Excuses charter school for 4 to 5 years could eliminate the achievement gap.
(p. 226)

At first reading, these studies are methodologically compelling. Their quantitative focus confers a sense of objectivity — albeit falsely, as we will explore later in this chapter (Crawford *et al*, 2018; Gillborn, Warmington and Demack, 2018; DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz, 2018b) — and the quasi-randomisation means they can lay claim to the causality of “no excuses” and academic gains. However, each of these studies is based on very limited assumptions and focuses heavily on achievement data, a measure that belies restricted and racialised curricular content and which is extremely susceptible to racial bias (Lingard, 2011; Au, 2015; Gillborn, Warmington and Demack, 2018; Sablan, 2019). Indeed, these are some of the key challenges critical to “no excuses”, which we will explore in more detail in the next section.

2.2.1.b Challenging the academic gains data

One of the key challengers of the academic gains data is Sondel, who draws on her ethnographies and interviews of “no excuses” approaches that feature widely among the critical literature, and whose approaches allow us to access other impacts of “no excuses”, including pupils’ and teachers’ experiences.

Sondel (2015a) draws on her ethnography to challenge the ‘flawed methodology and exaggerated reporting’ (p. 112) in the academic achievement gains literature described above. For example, her data included teachers’ confessions that ‘[t]hey all, [teachers and leaders at “no excuses” schools] massage the data and it is obvious’ (p. 117). This adds weight to the notion that numerical data is *not* neutral and objective (Crawford *et al*, 2018; Gillborn, Warmington and Demack, 2018; DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz, 2018b).

This critique of assessment data is also called into question on a structural level. For example, even before teachers can massage this data, Au (2015) argues that the high-stakes assessment processes associated with “no excuses” make racist assumptions: non-Whiteness is subtracted from the curriculum to advance notions of ‘standardisation’ and Whiteness is presented as the overwhelming norm. Thus, these tests deny students of colour a fair and equal shot at success, even before they sit them. In addition, the narrowing of the curriculum and pressures of high-stakes testing are more prevalent in schools with large populations of non-White students. Their subsequent and almost inevitable lack of success feeds into racially oppressive policy decisions and narratives. Gillborn

(2010a) also notes that those who analyse present assessment data often do so with racial presuppositions that often distort ‘what counts as real inequality’ and thus ‘public debate and policy outcomes’ (p. 253).

This literature offers great value to this study. From exploring the racial presuppositions in the quantitative data to examining the discursive presentation of “no excuses,” this literature opens up a rich vein of possibilities for investigating the English growth and establishment of “no excuses”.

2.2.1.c Other critiques of the literature advocating “no excuses”

Beyond these challenges to the quantitative, positivistic methods, there are other reasons to be critical of the research supporting “no excuses”. In this section, we will explore two methodological concerns — namely, the selection of research participants and the failure to account for important confounding variables — and concerns over this research’s heavy US orientation. In doing so, I consider literature constructed with ethnographic data (such as Golann and Torres’ paper) and conceptual analyses (such as Lack and Horn’s).

For proponents to make an adequate case for the success of “no excuses”, they must consider the experiences of the communities affected by the policy. However, a key methodological issue is the racial whitewashing of voices from “no excuses” research. Lack’s (2009) conceptual analysis, for example, foregrounds the lacuna of racial and children’s voices in the literature promoting “no excuses” while some researchers highlight the lack of parental voice in school

choice discourses (Warrington, 2005; Goodman, 2013; Scott, 2013a; 2013b; Waitoller, Nguyen and Super, 2019; Golann, Debs and Weiss, 2019; Jabbar *et al*, 2022; Yazdiha, 2022; Cordes and Laurito, 2023).

Not only does the literature supporting “no excuses” fail to consider communities' experiences, an important component in judging the model's success, but it also fails to consider potentially confounding factors that might have more impact than the harsh disciplinary practices. Indeed, this is a criticism that “no excuses” proponents readily admit. For example, Krowka, Hadd and Marx (2017) acknowledge that their studies do not address which ‘individual key characteristics of No Excuses charter schools critical to the No Excuses model’ (p. 44) make the difference. Is it the strict behaviour policies, or other features, such as the extending instruction time? Gleason (2017) — another proponent — does try to make the case that strict behaviour policies are one of the ‘secret ingredients’ of his research review's eponymous title by offering KIPP and Doug Lemov's *Uncommon Schools* as exemplars. However, he also admits to using arbitrary ‘rules of thumb’ to determine success, including the caveat that ‘[f]indings were based on strong evidence if at least four studies found a consistent statistically significant relationship between a particular characteristic and charter-school impacts with no strong counter-evidence’ (p. 569). While a rule of thumb might not match the randomised ‘gold standard’ promoted by “no excuse” proponents (Powers, 2015; Tuttle *et al*, 2015; Torres and Golann, 2018), Gleason (2017) himself notes:

The correlation between a charter school's behaviour policy and impacts does not prove that the policy itself caused the school to be effective. Other factors, such as the nature of the student population or other policies used by the schools, could be driving their impacts.

(p.571)

Indeed, others caution that strict discipline is not necessary for — and not a guarantee of — academic achievement. In Torres and Golann's (2018) critical policy review, they argue that 'what drives the success of no-excuses schools may be their other features, not their sweating-the-small-stuff disciplinary approach' (p. 6).

So, if we cannot pinpoint harsh disciplinary practices as the key or 'secret' ingredient of "no excuses", what other factors might make the difference? Funding is one possible ingredient: US "no excuses" schools often have access to more funding than other schools (Miron, Urschel and Saxton, 2011; Torres and Golann, 2018). This would bring "no excuses" achievement gap rhetoric in line with what Ladson-Billings (2006b) refers to as the *education debt*, a reformulation of the racial achievement gap that takes into account its 'historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral components' (p. 3). Could it be money rather than behaviour practices that make the biggest difference? Given that this aspect is not accounted for in the positivist "no excuses" literature, we cannot be sure. This critique highlights the importance of examining "no excuses" policy construction and framing.

Another possible confounder is racial segregation, a possibility raised by Cheng *et al* (2017) in their positive meta-analytic appraisal of “no excuses”. Miron, Urschel and Saxton (2011) offer some credibility to this: not only did early KIPP schools have an underrepresentation of students with disabilities or classified as learning English (analogous to the UK’s English as an Additional Language, EAL), but their rate of student attrition was higher. These US perspectives underline the importance of examining the possibility of racial segregation in the English growth of “no excuses”.

Indeed, when the heavily US-oriented “no excuses” research is promoted by English policymakers, we have cause to be concerned given the shortcomings we have just explored. For example, Michael Gove — former Secretary of State for Education, 2010-2014 — cited Dobbie and Fryer’s (2011) quantitative academic gains study (DfE, 2012). Where policies are internationally recontextualised, they ‘mutate and morph during their journeys’ (Peck and Theodore, 2010, p. 170). If, for example, the racial segregation speculated on in the US “no excuses” literature was apparent in England, we have a moral imperative to research it.

Beyond challenging the research English policymakers cite, we also have an imperative to challenge the framing of “no excuses” in a similar vein to US researchers. For example, US proponents appear quick to jump to *ad hominem*

attacks to discredit critics. Maranto and Ritter (2014), for example, assert this non-sequitur as a parenthetical aside when attacking Horn's (2010) challenge to the aggressive "no excuses" means to academic ends:

(Interestingly, at this writing Horn indicates that he has never been inside a KIPP school.) (p. 240)

This example illustrates how proponents might attempt to shut down critical voices. Where power is indicated by who *is* and who is *not* afforded a voice in public discourse (Ladson-Billings, 1998), examining the policy framing of "no excuses" in the discourse of English policymakers will give an indication of whether and how "no excuses" is racialised in England.

2.2.2 The shifting sands of educational purpose

So far, we have focused on the proponents' "no excuses" literature and challenged it on its own terms by critiquing its methods and assumptions. However, this body of literature defines "no excuses" impact very narrowly, but according to other "no excuses" research, its impact is much broader, as we will see in the following sections. One of the most pervasive and invidious impacts of "no excuses", though, is represented in the shifting purpose of schooling.

Earlier, we heard how "no excuses" teachers manipulate assessment data (Sondel, 2015a). For Sondel, this — and "no excuses" schooling generally — is

emblematic of the changing purpose of education towards the production of assessment data, which has become ‘the primary proxy used to determine the effectiveness of educational experiences’ (p. 109). Through this neoliberal lens, knowledge is valued through its instrumental, financial utility rather than its intrinsic value and test scores — used to hold teachers and leaders to account — are a form of capital superseding other educational purposes in what Sondel (2016) refers to elsewhere as the *silent passivity of neoliberal schooling* (p. 171). This echoes what Ellison (2012) argued in his conceptual analysis of KIPP, where we can see such schools as:

[A]pparatuses of security in a neo-liberal state that instil in their students the norms, ideologies, and habitus that both reflects and generates the societal reality in which it is situated. (p. 571)

On these terms, “no excuses” is not just a schooling model but a *de facto* philosophical model that individualises students through their apparent choices of behaviour, attitude and attendance. Such a framing of choice moves responsibility away from teachers and school leaders to the students. Where strict discipline policies afford no individual autonomy or agency to its students, the “choice” framing is contradictorily problematic. Those doing this framing — including “what works” educational researchers (Lack, 2009) and policymakers (Picower and Mayorga, 2015) — are complicit in this troubling, invidious and insidious *fait accompli*. Picower and Mayorga (2015) illustrate this in their

argument that '[r]acism and privatisation are destroying our schools, and standardised tests are the weapon' (p. 14). The saturation of urban US neighbourhoods with corporate "no excuses" schools also simultaneously responsabilises and disempowers parental choice (Picower and Mayorga, 2015), a phenomenon also noted by Stahl (2020). In England, the discursive and geographical patterns of "no excuses" have not been explored; considering the issues presented in this section, it warrants much closer attention.

2.2.2.a College as purpose

In another overt purpose of "no excuses", we find another unintended consequence in the literature. "No excuses" proponents strenuously express their desire to send their pupils to — and prepare them for — college (Maranto and Ritter, 2014; Lamboy and Lu, 2017; Noll, 2022). However, many have found that "no excuses" will likely do the opposite. In an ethnographic study, Golann (2015) found that "no excuses" harsh disciplinary practices created 'worker-learners' (p. 103) who are ill-equipped to succeed on campus, a finding reinforced by Noll's (2022) similar ethnographic study. Even before they send students to college, though, there is evidence that the "no excuses" KIPP CMO falls well short of its 'college acceptance' targets and fails its students with its far worse college 'completion record' (Pondiscio, 2013, p. 2).

Thus, "no excuses" falls short in three of the shifting purposes it represents — individual choice, sending students to college and inculcating in students the value of knowledge. While these offer fruitful avenues of exploration in the English

expression of the model, the often overtly expressed purpose of “no excuses” as a cultural battleground we explore in the next section is possibly the most troubling.

2.2.3 “No excuses” as a cultural battleground

The cultural battleground expressed in the proponents’ literature and noted in the critical literature is set out across various battle lines. In this section, we first explore the battle for knowledge in “no excuses”, which diminishes non-White knowledge in a manner we have already explored through the structural deficiencies of high-stakes testing. Next, we explore the cultural battle “no excuses” policymakers overtly desire and examine the practices “no excuses” schools employ to carry out this battle to set the scene of racialised harm.

2.2.3.a A knowledge battleground

Knowledge is a core component of the “no excuses” rationale that its flagship organisations proudly wear: KIPP stands for ‘Knowledge is Power Program,’ and England’s Michaela Community School’s motto is ‘knowledge is power’. Indeed, the “no excuses” conception of knowledge is very closely associated with E.D. Hirsch’s (1987) work and, in particular, his list of ‘[w]hat literate Americans know’ (p. 146) that he argues should be taught explicitly to advance the eponymous ‘Cultural Literacy’.

This knowledge-oriented battle is part of a well-worn process of racial domination. For Cushing (2023a), the knowledge focus of “no excuses” is ‘an extension of the

European colonial project and a prime example of white ignorance' that supports White supremacy by actively and systematically ignoring anything that may be a 'threat to the project of whiteness' (p. 3). Indeed, this also chimes with Apple's (2006) argument that a preoccupation with 'real knowledge', 'cultural pollution' (p. 40) and a 'romantic appraisal with the past' (p. 39) is a hallmark of the neoconservative position. While benign on the surface, this knowledge-rich orientation 'is symbolic of patriarchal, white supremacist, anti-Black and colonial logics in education policy' (Cushing, 2023a, p. 7), which opens the door for other forms of cultural battle.

2.2.3.b No excuses as a cultural battle

This 'sense of cultural pollution' (Apple, 2006, p. 40) bleeds into "no excuses" narratives outside knowledge discourses. This is evident in Thernstrom and Thernstrom's (2004), 'No Excuses: Closing The Racial Gap In Learning', the progenitor "no excuses" text. They suggest extending school hours, which would enhance academic gains and allow students 'less time to run into trouble in the neighbourhood' (p. 46). This is emblematic of the way educators and policymakers view Black and Latinx cultures as inferior to academic White culture (Picower and Mayorga, 2015). Indeed, they quite openly profess their desire 'to "counter and transform" African-American "cultural patterns"' (p. 147).

This narrative is echoed in England by Jonathan Porter (2016), a teacher at the Michaela Community School, who argues to pupils that outside of Michaela, 'adults in your [their] life — parents and teachers — are abrogating their moral or

professional responsibilities' (p. 69). For Porter, Michaela offers the cultural separation between home and school, which he believes his pupils need. As such, for Porter, his school performs as a cultural battleground, a notion that is unequivocally reinforced through the title of Michaela's manifesto text his chapter sits within: 'Battle Hymn of the Tiger Teachers: The Michaela Way'.

This position recurs elsewhere in the literature. Sondel's (2016) "no excuses" ethnography found that 'many teachers actively sought to create a barrier between their classroom culture and what they perceived as a chaotic and dangerous home culture' (p. 180). Other authors also note teachers' preoccupation with students' perceived cultural deficits (e.g. Sondel, Kretchmar and Dunn, 2019; Golann, 2021), a position that is not unique to "no excuses" (e.g. Ladson-Billings, 2006a; Aggarwal, 2016).

One way "no excuses" expresses these deficits and its response to them is through "character education". Ellison (2012) notes that from its inception, KIPP's inaugurators — Levin and Feinberg — 'assert that the most important element of the KIPP model is its focus on character building' (pp. 553-554). Michaela's teachers, too, labour their character education goals. They want their students to be 'drenched in gratitude and filled with respect' (Hin-Tai Ting, 2016, p. 105), they require pupils to learn '[k]indness, gratitude and empathy' (Porter, 2016, p. 68) and they reinforce '[r]esponsibility, self-discipline and willpower' (Kirby, 2016, p. 80) with bootcamps.

“No excuses” approach to character education originates from the positive psychology movement (Horn, 2010; Ellison, 2012; Ellison and Iqtadar, 2020) founded by Martin Seligman (2006). It seeks to promote concepts such as learned optimism (Seligman, 2006) and grit (Duckworth *et al*, 2007). However, the tools of “no excuses” are not necessarily congruent with these goals. Dishon and Goodman (2017) argue that “no excuses” schools deny ‘practice in autonomous decision-making, and habituation in the service of principles’ (p. 182), two central character education mechanisms. Researchers across both sides of the Atlantic have also noted how “no excuses” schools inculcate the passivity and compliance of Foucault’s (1991) docile bodies (Golann, 2015; Cushing, 2021; Ellison and Iqtadar, 2020; Golann and Jones, 2021). And Porter’s (2016) boast of Michaela’s ‘carrot and stick’ (p. 70) offers a perfect example of Goodman’s (2013) observation that ‘[r]ules and incentives [...] do not generate moral will; they are a substitute for them’ (p. 93). For Dishon and Goodman (2017), this illustrates perfectly R.S. Peters’ (1981) ‘paradox of moral education’:

The emphasis in NE schools on meticulous management of conduct on the one hand, and the aspiration to prepare students to the open-ended college setting on the other, is an extreme manifestation of [...] ‘the paradox of moral education’: the tension between habit inculcation and the development of autonomous reasoning. (p. 183)

Thus, even if we can take it at face value that policymakers truly desire character education, “no excuses” extreme behaviourism is not a suitable means to these ends. As we saw earlier, “no excuses” is associated with the tendency to ‘develop

worker-learners — children who monitor themselves, hold back their opinions, and defer to authority — rather than lifelong learners’ (Golann, 2015, p. 103). In other ethnographic accounts, students cannot self-advocate for their behaviour (Marsh, 2021) and teachers feel ‘agony’ (Sondel, 2015b, p. 295) at their ‘lack of capacity and freedom’ (p. 289). Thus, we might question entirely the moral basis of character education justifications: if character education is truly a goal of policymakers, then they are either genuinely ignorant of the effects of “no excuses” or disingenuously pursuing a policy for other ends.

That notwithstanding, such goals represent fertile discursive grounds for a cultural battle through “no excuses” practices. One example is SLANT which stands for:

Sit up straight

Listen to the teacher

Ask and answer questions in full sentences

Nod your head

Track the speaker (Cushing, 2021, p. 31)

Just as the neoconservative preoccupation with knowledge represents a battleground for Apple (2006), for Cushing (2022) SLANT represents part of a racio-linguistic strategy to dominate and control the bodies of students of colour

as part of an ongoing, timeworn battle for linguistic control (Cushing, 2021; 2022; 2023a; 2023b).

Horn's (2010) conceptualisation of these "no excuses" cultural battlegrounds as part of a *de facto* campaign of 'cultural eugenics' perpetrated by 'those who view the transmission of urban cultural traits as a threat to White middle-class values and economic prosperity' (p. 93) offers us a moment to reflect on the harms of "no excuses". While stridently polemic, Horn's conceptual analysis of KIPP schools is important to the context of this study because of his attention to the discursive and pseudo-philanthropic origins of "no excuses" in the US. If, as Horn suggests, "no excuses" might be part of a process operating to suppress — or eliminate even — cultures that are overtly described as undesirable, examining the construction of such discursive battlegrounds in England is urgent and offers us a direction to explore the harms we might see.

2.2.4 The harms and brutality of "no excuses"

So far, I have made the case that "no excuses" represents a racialised cultural battleground and that the incompatibility between policymakers' character education means and ends renders them complicit in any harm caused by their policy. Using Horn's admittedly polemic 'cultural eugenics' phrase, I started to argue that "no excuses" is both racially brutal as well as harmful. In this section, I explore these in more detail, starting with the origins of "no excuses", and I argue that this presents us with an imperative to examine English policymakers' promotion of the model.

While we have explored the “no excuses” use of character education on an instrumental level, the assumptions behind its positive psychology origins reveal another sinister side to the model: deeply embedded responsabilisation. Horn (2010) characterises the resolution of the tension between institutional, individual and circumstantial responsibility as an institutional *fait accompli*:

KIPP [...] applies ample and ongoing doses of Dr. Seligman’s ‘learned optimism’ techniques that aim to instil resilience and to temper reactions to the unalterable compliance mechanisms by encouraging the illusion of individual choice. By doing so, any anger or resentment among students arising out of punishments becomes internalised and accepted as the resultant consequences of improper individual choices and actions, rather than being directed outward toward questioning the organisational structure of total control and constant surveillance. [...] And if things don’t work out for these children [...] they will at least have learned along the way that they can blame no one but themselves for their own shortcomings and failure.’ (p. 97)

This insidious transference of responsibility from institutions to individuals is confounded by the fact that tightly controlled classrooms can lead to diminished intrinsic motivation and self-esteem (Bailey *et al*, 2019) and that the grit required for the ‘self-directed learning characteristic of college’ (p. 191) is different from

the grit needed to negotiate a ‘tightly managed institution’ (Dishon and Goodman, 2017, p. 191).

The perniciousness of “no excuses” positive psychology orientation extends beyond the responsibilisation of “learned optimism” to the other side of the positive psychology coin, learned helplessness — ‘the giving-up reaction, the quitting response that follows from the belief that whatever you do doesn’t matter’ (Seligman, 2006, p. 15). Learned helplessness was Seligman’s original research interest and involved mistreating dogs, something he is keen to distance himself from. Ellison (2012) draws our attention to the similarities between “no excuses” practices, learned helplessness and the US military’s practices that ‘deconstruct detainees making them totally dependent on interrogators so as to then reconstruct compliant, cooperative individuals’ (p. 566). He argues that for students to survive the harsh disciplinary environment of “no excuses”, these practices amount to ‘psychological immunisation’ (p. 558) — another positive psychology concept. While Ellison stops just short of calling “no excuses” an exercise in learned helplessness, Horn (2010) is less reticent:

And so it is, then, that KIPP children are initiated into a state that may easily be mistaken for learned helplessness if it were not for the KIPP promotional literature that labels it ‘self-control.’ However we choose to characterise the resulting submissive detachment these KIPP children exhibit, it is achieved by unrelenting and constant surveillance, harsh and sure verbal castigation, public humiliation and labelling, manipulative reinforcement, and ostracising isolation. (p. 97)

On these terms, “no excuses” is built on concepts that are either concerned with harm or have been used deliberately to cause harm.

The precise techniques themselves also engender harm. Goodman (2017) points out that shame is woven into the fabric of KIPP’s behaviour policies from KIPP’s use of the ‘bench’ — a practice where students not complying are ‘seated in an isolated space [...], permitted to talk with teachers but not to one another, and separated from the class at lunch’ (p. 28) — to public displays of punishment. Shame has long been associated with psychological harm, a link that Bailey *et al* (2019) draw clearly:

To the extent that “no excuses” disciplinary approaches weaken the quality of relationships in the classroom, use shame and fear in an attempt to change behaviour, limit autonomy and skill-building opportunities, damage the development of positive self-concept and self-efficacy, and disproportionately punish low-income children of colour and students with disabilities, we argue they are likely to be actively harmful to children. (p. 3)

And while Goodman (2017) argues that shame is probably unavoidable in schools (p. 30), the shame associated with “no excuses” is particularly damaging. Goodman and Uzon (2013), for example, found that “no excuses” students were particularly compliant and often self-disparaging and distrustful of their own ability

to deal with freedom, but they were assimilated into having a strong affinity towards their school's strict discipline. While not the 'detachment' Horn (2010, p. 97) described in his KIPP polemic, these findings are indicative of the kinds of compliance and submission associated with learned helplessness (Seligman, 2006).

To compound these particularly damning perspectives, other studies have described how "no excuses" harsh disciplinary practices lead to diminished test performance (Perry and Morris, 2014), low self-esteem (Bailey *et al*, 2019) and even a psychological impact on children who are not suspended (Perry and Morris, 2014). These perspectives, drawn from an extensive 16,897 student US regression analysis (Perry and Morris, 2014) and a psychological research summary drawing on peer-reviewed quantitative studies and qualitative case studies (Bailey *et al*, 2019), illustrate the counterproductive, self-defeating approach of employing "no excuses" practices for academic and character education outcomes. If English policymakers profess to want holistically positive outcomes for our pupils, we may hold them to account by examining the spread of "no excuses" in light of such evidence.

We might reasonably describe the accumulation of such harmful effects as 'brutal'. James-Gallaway's (2022) autoethnographic reflection on his time as a Black male teacher in a New Orleans "no excuses" school certainly sounds brutal:

The moment of placing Torrance on bench taught me that the tool serves torture-based aims. As I stood in front of Torrance with blue tape in my hand, he clenched his fist to contain his emotions. As I unwound the tape, tears streaked down Torrance's face onto his shirt. His eyes had a blank stare as I tore off two pieces of tape and placed them in an X over his logo. Torrance's reaction told me that this tool was unjust and forced students into an unproductive mental space. Bench was about getting Black students to submit to the rules by stripping away their souls through isolation, known as spirit murdering, a form of racial assault (Williams, 1987). In the moment, all I could see was a crying Black boy standing in front of me, a Black man who was told by a white administrator to apply the harm. This interaction stirred sadness in me because I realised I was a Black man who worked for a school that harmed Black children. With this episode, I realised early on that I would need to find or create ways to reclaim both my students' and my own humanity in school. (p.70)

'[T]orture-based aims', 'spirit murdering' and 'racial assault' illustrate the racial brutality of "no excuses". Elsewhere, he likens the practices with plantation slavery (p. 69), the prison yard (p. 68), militaristic practice (p. 60) — in accordance with Lack's (2009) observation — and 'intentional damage' (p. 70).

While we can infer brutality through the origins of "no excuses" and its practices, we might also infer masochistic pride: Horn (2010), for example, describes a 'legendary' basketball game between Levin and Feinberg — KIPP's co-founders

— that ‘ended only after both [...] succumbed to utter exhaustion’ (p. 92). He also describes an anecdote of Feinberg throwing a chair through a window with children present (p. 92). For Horn, at least, these incidences exemplify the ‘hyper-masculine’ (p. 91) and ‘sadistic’ (p. 92) ‘masochism’ (p. 92) at the heart of “no excuses” and its leaders.

Policies ‘mutate and morph’ when they are recontextualised (Peck and Theodore, 2010, p. 170), but in England, it is not clear how they have done so. When US “no excuses” leadership is so steeped in brutality and masochism, we have a moral imperative to explore how English policymakers view and promote the policy. This is a core concern of this study, which seeks to explore the English growth and establishment of “no excuses”. Thus, it is important to consider what discursive and institutional patterns are representative of the harms and brutality of “no excuses”, which we explore in the following sections on “no excuses” and racial criminalisation, moral panics and bias in behaviour systems.

2.2.4.a Moral panics and “no excuses”

Policymakers often underscore harsh disciplinary practices with moral panics (Hirschfield, 2008). This has been the case in the US where anti-Black racism was the protagonist force in the post-hurricane Katrina expansion of “no excuses” schools (Offutt-Chaney, 2019) and in the UK, where Ofsted’s (2014) ‘Below The Radar’ report which paints a picture of constant low-level disruption (Graham, 2017), serves a similar purpose. Kulz’s (2019) ‘folk devils’ metaphor neatly captures the way ‘securitisation and neoliberal governance draw on discourses

of criminal' blackness (p. 93) to legitimise the racialised exclusion associated with zero-tolerance in the UK. More broadly, racialised moral panics are embedded into UK and US exclusionary and disciplinary discourses and are noted in race-oriented (e.g. Ladson-Billings, 2006a; Gillborn, 2010a; Crawford, 2017; Kulz, 2019; Nijjar, 2021) and race-neutral (e.g. Smith, 2023; Hirschfield, 2008) studies and perspectives. Outside of disciplinary practice, moral panics underscore other racialised policies such as 'fundamental British values' (Crawford, 2017), the 'armed social work' (Turner, 2018, p. 765) of the Prevent strategy (Crawford, 2017; Turner, 2018) and linguistic surveillance and control (Cushing, 2022; 2023b).

For Gillborn (2018), this is not a surprise: this fear — often manifestly anti-Black — pervades the UK's education system, and is '[f]luid, [r]elentless, [i]ndividual and [s]ystemic' (p. 66). As such, even presented in race-evasive terms, these moral panics are tacitly constructed with racialised fear, an argument made by many scholars of race (Picower, 2009; Gillborn, 2018; Sondel, Kretchmar and Dunn, 2019; Baggett and Andrzejewski, 2020; James-Gallaway, 2022; Marsh and Walker, 2022; Cushing, 2023b). This perspective is valuable to this study as it illustrates that even when moral panic discourses do not explicitly feature race, race is still likely to be a latent feature and thus must be examined. The other side of the moral panic coin is exclusionary practice, to which we now turn.

We have already seen how the “no excuses” is a response to clamp down on the perceived cultural deficits of racialised populations. But whether presented colour-evasively or otherwise, the harsh disciplinary practices of “no excuses” are articulated racially through disproportionate disciplinary outcomes. This is sometimes called the discipline gap, defined as ‘the disproportionate and differential use of exclusionary action against Black and other racially marginalised children in schools’ (Sevon, 2022, p. 1249). There are many analyses in the literature that bear this out. For example, Sullivan, Larke and Webb-Hasan’s (2010) CritQuant approach uncovered disproportionate racial exclusion in ‘zero tolerance’ Texas schools, where African American students received more than one-third of all ‘disciplining actions’ (p. 80) and over half of the suspensions and exclusions, despite only constituting around 14% of the enrolled population. Similarly, Hoffman (2014) found that Black students lost more days suspended than White students and Losen *et al* (2016) calculate that charter schools — the schooling model most closely associated with “no excuses” — suspended Black children at a rate 10% higher than White children. For Skiba, Fergus and Gregory (2023), such racialised disparities ‘represent a key component of structural racism’ (p. 215); by extension, these studies indicate that “no excuses” — in the US at least — is also structurally racist.

While there is no extant quantitative research on “no excuses” exclusions in England, the Timpson (2019) review indicates that Black Caribbean pupils and Mixed White and Black Caribbean pupils were more likely to be excluded than pupils from other ethnic groups across all school types in England. When we

consider Gillborn *et al*'s (2021) methodological criticism that the report downplays racism, racialised exclusion is likely to be much higher. Elsewhere, Stewart-Hall, Langham and Miller (2023) have also found that Black children are more likely to be excluded in the UK. Thus, we know that racialised exclusions are already a feature of the UK's education system, even if we do not know how "no excuses" influences this. While we may not be able to examine the exclusionary data within the scope and limitations of this study, the heavy racialised exclusion of US "no excuses" presents us with a methodological imperative to quantitatively explore the patterns of "no excuses" growth in England and to pay particular attention to the policy's target populations.

Official exclusion is just the tip of the iceberg, however. "No excuses" is also associated with *indirect* exclusion — through unscrupulous practices such as off-rolling (Timpson, 2019) — which is just as pernicious but even more insidious. In the US, "no excuses" is associated with higher student attrition rates (who are often replaced with higher-achieving students) (Miron, Urschel and Saxon, 2011; Nichols-Barrer *et al*, 2016). They are also noted to send students home 'off the books, with nobody documenting the dismissal and minimal or no inquiry into the circumstances that led to the misbehaviour' (Carr, 2019, p. 8) and encourage SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) students 'to enrol in a different school' (Waitoller, Nguyen and Super, 2019, p. 294).

Timpson (2019) notes this trend in the general school population of the UK, but it has been observed directly in an English flagship "no excuses" school, Mossbourne Community Academy. In her ethnography, Kulz (2013) found that

students who ‘cannot submit to Mossbourne’s logic’ are ‘pushed to its periphery’ (p. 182) and forced to ‘work in silent isolation’ (p. 95) for ‘large amounts of time’. While there is no direct evidence of “no excuses” schools off-rolling in the UK, Gill (2017) argues that official exclusion data is ‘only the tip of the iceberg’ and that children are often ‘functionally excluded’ (p. 2) in England through off-rolling practices that even Ofsted (2017) describe as gaming (p. 6).

Whether direct or indirect, we might consider these exclusionary practices to engineer ‘push-out’, rendering “no excuses” as racialisation ‘by design’ (Skiba, Arredondo and William, 2014, p. 548). Thus, there is an urgent need to examine the growth and establishment of “no excuses” in England.

2.2.4.c “No Excuses” as criminalisation

Before arriving in education, “no excuses” was a policing policy with a ‘zero tolerance’, broken windows logic that assumed punishing small infractions means fewer infractions (Skiba and Peterson, 1999; Greene, 2014; Golann, 2015). Criminalisation has long been embedded in education (e.g. Monroe, 2005; Hirschfield, 2008; Skiba, Arredondo and Williams, 2014; Ramey, 2015; Nijjar, 2021; Sevon, 2022; Cushing, 2022; 2023a; 2023b) and is evident in school security guards and video cameras (Hirschfield, 2008; Piro, 2008), criminalised and pathologised labelling (Ramey, 2015; Marsh, 2018), and police-school partnerships (Nijjar, 2021).

For some researchers, this trend is characterised through the *school-to-prison pipeline* metaphor which Sevon (2022) defines as '[th]e act of criminalising students is the underlying mechanism that makes schools harmful spaces for Black students' (p. 1248). Skiba, Arredondo and Williams (2014) argue this is more than just a metaphor: because it is borne out in the reality of exclusionary discipline, it is a useful heuristic. Indeed, the school-to-prison-pipeline is keenly felt in students' lived experience: in James-Gallaway's (2022) autoethnography, one refers to the KIPP acronym as the 'Kids in Prison Program' (p. 58).

Whether metaphorical or literal, the pipeline concept draws attention to the marginalisation of students of colour by behaviour policies. Researchers on both sides of the Atlantic find that teachers treat students differently according to race, whether through, for example, labelling (Okonofua and Eberhardt, 2015; Marsh, 2018), a sense of racial threat (Welch and Payne, 2010), increased surveillance and control (Monroe, 2005; Stewart-Hall, Langham and Miller, 2023), or exclusions and punitive actions (Skiba *et al*, 2002; Welch and Payne, 2010; Welsh, Rodriguez and Joseph, 2023; Stewart-Hall, Langham and Miller, 2023).

While space precludes a more thorough examination of these marginalisations here, it is clear that pupils *are* racially marginalised by teachers who pathologise and who are fearful of students of colour (e.g. Kailin, 1999; Tyson, 2003; Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Okonofua and Eberhardt, 2015) and that this leads to exclusions (Stewart-Hall, Langham and Miller, 2023). Thus, whether by cause, correlation or a mixture of the two, the school and prison connection is laid bare and it requires exploration in an English context.

2.2.5 Teachers and “no excuses”

In the previous section, we explored how teachers enacted racialised disciplinary practices that are implicated in student harm, but how do “no excuses” schools impact teachers in and of themselves as well as their relationship to their profession and students? Answering this question may give us more clues about “no excuses” expression in England and its potential to harm our students. As such, in this section, I will only briefly outline the key themes in the literature.

2.2.5.a Teacher autonomy, workload and burnout

Teachers are bound to the same severe institutional restrictions on their autonomy as their students. This is widely recognised in the literature (Torres, 2014; 2016a; 2016b; 2016c; 2019; Sondel, 2015a; 2015b; 2016; Golann, 2018; 2021; Golann and Jones, 2021; Marsh and Wilkerson, 2021; James-Gallaway, 2022) but one teacher’s comment — ‘[w]e were hired to be architects, but we were construction workers’ (Torres, 2014, p. 9) — illustrates this perfectly. However, teachers’ and leaders’ autonomy are supposedly the cornerstone of the UK’s academisation policy (DfE, 2014a). “No excuses” systematic denial of teacher autonomy is thus unpleasantly ironic (Sondel, 2016; Torres, 2016a, 2016b; Golann, 2018, 2021; Marsh and Wilkerson, 2021; James-Gallaway, 2022). Teachers express discomfort working in “no excuses” schools (Brown, 2013; Golann, 2018, 2021; Marsh and Wilkerson, 2021; James-Gallaway, 2022), are forced to employ an impoverished range of pedagogies (Sondel, 2016; Graham, 2017; Golann, 2021) and build negative relationships with their students

(Golann, 2021; Marsh, 2021; Marsh and Wilkerson, 2021; James-Gallaway, 2022). These effects harm pupil and teacher outcomes — especially well-being outcomes (Sutherland and Oswald, 2005; Cornelius-White, 2007; Baker, Grant and Morlock, 2008; Demanet and van Houtte, 2012; Guidetti *et al*, 2018; Koca, 2018) — and ultimately increase teacher burnout and turnover (Furgeson *et al*, 2011; Tuttle *et al*, 2013; Torres, 2014; 2016a; 2016b; 2016c; Golann, 2021).

This latter point is potentially very harmful. “No excuses” teachers work extremely hard — Torres (2014) and Lack (2009) estimate they work between 60 and 80 hours per week in the US and KIPP’s co-founder David Feinberg boasts that KIPP’s teacher car parks are full at ‘seven in the morning and all the cars are there at five o’clock in the afternoon’ (Lack, 2009, pp. 72-73). Thus, they are more likely to leave the profession (Furgeson *et al*, 2011; Tuttle *et al*, 2013; Torres, 2016c; Golann, 2021). Where teacher recruitment and retention are at crisis levels in England (Adams, 2023; Weale, 2023b), and with “no excuses” association with teacher attrition, examining the growth and spread of “no excuses” is both urgent and vital.

2.2.5.b Mission fit and teacher heterogeneity in “no excuses”

How might I go about examining such impacts that might be inculcated through England’s “no excuses” growth and establishment? Examining the ways teachers and leaders interact with “no excuses” practices and discourses offers another useful methodological direction.

While “no excuses” teachers are subjected to extreme rigidity, there is a great deal of heterogeneity in how teachers enact “no excuses”. Some feel constrained and conflicted (Torres, 2014; 2016c; Golann, 2018) while others frame their practice with a “control as care” perspective and balance aspects of “no excuses” to meet their values (Lopez Kershen, Weiner and Torres, 2018; Golann and Jones, 2021). Golann (2018) observed four ‘ideal types’ of teachers in “no excuses” schools: *conformers*, who conform wholly to schools’ systems; *imitators*, who culturally *retool*; *adapters*, who modify practices rather than their styles; *rejecters*, who entirely reject the practices. Although teachers are encouraged, ‘[e]mbrace your bitch’ (p. 40), such ‘cultural retooling’ is costly — if indeed possible — and only *conformers* are likely to embody the harsh behavioural practices successfully. Indeed, there are many examples of teachers rejecting “no excuses” entirely to avoid damaging their students’ and their own physical and psychological well-being (Torres, 2014; Marsh, 2018; 2021; Golann, 2021; Marsh and Wilkerson, 2021; James-Gallaway, 2022; Marsh and Walker, 2022).

A core mediating factor in teacher responses is mission fit, as espoused by “no excuses” principals. “No excuses” is often couched in the language of the mission (Carter, 2000; Horn, 2010; Kulz, 2013; Sondel, 2015b; Elliot, 2018; Golann, 2018; Rauschenberger, 2020; Stahl, 2020); “no excuses” schools and organisations often position themselves altruistically (Crawford-Garrett and Thomas, 2018; Elliot, 2018; Rauschenburger, 2020; Cushing, 2021; Golann, 2021) or as with a crusading character. Teach First, a teacher-training organisation closely aligned

with “no excuses” (Crawford-Garrett and Thomas, 2018; Dunn, 2021), exemplifies this framing:

Teach First shapes its already privileged ambassadors into its own image, creating a Trojan army of mini neo-liberalists, empowered to move onwards and upwards from the classroom to the boardroom, taking with it its elitist sense of entitlement and a heroic, individualistic, meritocratic approach to the work that it does. (Elliott, 2018, p. 272)

This illustrates how “no excuses” teachers and leaders view their role — an important part of its growth and establishment that we will explore in the next section. That notwithstanding, “no excuses” leaders prize mission fit in their recruitment and high-stakes teacher evaluation processes (Torres, 2019; Golann, 2021). Because mission fit so strongly orients teachers and leaders towards pedagogies and exclusionary practices, deficit narratives and impoverished educational experiences — in short, because of its mediating role in the myriad harms of “no excuses” — examining the mission discourses of the growth of “no excuses” in England would be methodologically appropriate and fruitful.

2.2.6 Racially framing “no excuses”

Thus far, I have outlined the racialised harms of “no excuses” and argued that examining the discourses surrounding them would be a fruitful avenue to explore. What other racial framings does the literature indicate we might explore in “no excuses”? In this section, I argue that the White saviourism literature offers us

one such avenue and highlights the way that Whiteness tends to objectify and oppress people of colour through such discourses. In addition, I argue that exploring the geographical expression of these forms of oppression is a methodologically appropriate way to challenge the growth of “no excuses”, especially where race is not discussed in public discourse.

2.2.6.a “No excuses” and White saviourism

As we explored in the section 2.2.5, the “no excuses” mission is often presented as an altruistic, crusading endeavour. Underlying that is a strong undercurrent of white saviourism (Cammarota, 2011; Brown, 2013; Straubhaar, 2015; Sondel, Kretchmar and Dunn, 2019; Willuweit, 2020), defined as when:

[A] white person guides people of colour from the margins to the mainstream with his or her own initiative and benevolence.
(Cammarota, 2011, p. 243)

White saviour relationships reify a difference between the ‘smarts’ of the White saviour and their ‘hapless/helpless’ (Cammarota, 2011, p. 243) racialised objects. They put the White saviour into the spotlight, which elides their role in perpetuating and obscuring systemic inequality. As such, it represents White privilege. Cole (2012) captures this in his White saviour industrial complex metaphor:

The white saviour supports brutal policies in the morning, founds charities in the afternoon, and receives awards in the evening. (p. 1)

Cole's (2012) metaphor reveals something about how white privilege works: Whiteness can only save that which they have already objectified and oppressed (Willuweit, 2020). White saviourism saturates contemporary life, from international development and volunteer tourism (Bandyopadhyay, 2019; Aggarwal *et al*, 2020; Büyüm *et al*, 2020; Anderson, Knee and Mowatt, 2021; Banerjee *et al*, 2023; Kimani, 2023), to Hollywood representations in films such as 'Dangerous Minds' and 'Freedom Writers' (Vera and Gordon, 2011; Brown, 2013).

Outside of Hollywood, White saviourism is rooted in educational reality and, in particular, "no excuses" schooling. It is evident in the 'hiring practices, discipline policies, and school culture' (Sondel, Kretchmar and Dunn, 2019, p. 1) of "no excuses" schools, but also in their teachers' 'tokenistic diversity and equality' (Brown, 2013, p. 130). Indeed, urban education generally allows Whites to 'act out roles as 'white knights' driven by guilt and misguided generosity' (Allen, 2004, p. 128) and 'enter urban classrooms' intent on 'saving their students or the schools' (Ponnock, Torsney and Lombardi, 2018, p. 38). Similarly, White saviourism saturates teacher education (Lensmire and Snaza, 2010; Ponnock, Torsney and Lombardi, 2018), with "no excuses" teacher education organisations being especially dependent on such discourses (Elliott, 2018; Rauschenberger, 2020) of 'heroic, philanthropic, life-changing work' (p. 272).

What function might White saviourism serve, and why might this be important to our study? The literature indicates that one function is to emotionally validate White privilege (Cole, 2012; Anderson, Knee, and Mowatt, 2021); according to Cole (2012):

This world exists simply to satisfy the needs — including, importantly, the sentimental needs — of white people and Oprah. [...] The White Savior Industrial Complex is not about justice. It is about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege. (p. 1)

White saviours feed this big emotional experience by constructing themselves as ‘powerful, handsome, brave, cordial, kind, firm and generous’ (Vera and Gordon, 2003, p. 116) and quasi-religious qualities (Horn, 2010; Cushing, 2023a) best exemplified through Vera and Gordon’s (2003) ‘White Messiah’ synonym. These constructions embody the contemporary conservative tendency towards evangelical conservatism and muscular Christianity (Apple, 2006; Brown, 2013; Du Mez, 2020; Willuweit, 2020; Anderson, Knee, and Mowatt, 2021) and are evident in Horn’s (2010) ‘KIPP crusaders’ who ‘embody the zeal of well-heeled colonialist missionaries on a crusade’ (p. 89) and Cushing’s (2023a) characterisation of UK “no excuses” proponents’ self-constructions as ‘neocolonial missionaries whose job is to save poor, ‘urban’ children [...] (p. 27). In the UK, Kulz (2013) offers Sir Michael Wilshaw — the former head of Mossbourne Academy and former Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education,

Children's Services and Skills — as the archetypal “no excuses” White saviour, replete with a metaphorical ‘missionary stance’ (p. 48).

Because some of the “no excuses” literature acknowledges White saviourism, it presents a suitable methodological lens to examine its growth and establishment in England. But as a racially objectifying concept, we might also ask who it might objectify; examining its racialised geographies might help in this endeavour.

2.2.6.b “No excuses”, colour-evasiveness and racialised urban geographies

Examining the racialised expression of “no excuses” — discursively and geographically — will not be straightforward. Often, White saviour and “no excuses” discourses are presented race-evasively (Cammarota, 2011; Brown, 2013; Sondel, Kretchmar and Dunn, 2019; Anderson, Knee and Mowatt, 2021; Golann, 2021). “No excuses” teachers often disregard race and denigrate students’ culture instead with ‘deep disdain’ (Sondel, Kretchmar and Dunn, 2019, p.17). Through these discourses, the “no excuses” literature starts to orient itself more toward a spatialisation of race through colour-evasive ‘battleground’ and ‘urban’ conceptualisations. These racial geographies are also drawn upon in other parts of the “no excuses” literature, especially regarding school choice.

We have already explored “no excuses” preoccupation with culture as a battleground, a point the literature is replete with (e.g. Horn, 2010; Kulz, 2014; Sondel, 2016; Bennett, 2017; Cheng *et al*, 2017; Gleason, 2017; Golann, 2018;

Sondel, Kretchmar and Dunn, 2019; Noll, 2022). For Ladson-Billings (2006a), teachers use 'culture' as a byword for patterns of behaviour they cannot explain: they overdetermine culture to 'explain everything' (p. 104) while avoiding the overt topic of race. As such, they can talk in racialised terms while evading notions of colour.

Colour-evasive ideologies often underpin "no excuses" rhetoric and policies, and this has an impact on its geographical expression. School choice policy, for example, is regularly couched in colour-evasive terms, which obscures its racialised, geographical nature (Hernández, 2022; Jabbar *et al*, 2002) and in the US, aggressive school takeover programmes which disengage heavily racialised communities and reduce teacher diversity are justified colour-evasively (Kretchmar, Sondel and Ferrare, 2014; Mirón, Beabout and Boselovic, 2015; White, 2016; Sondel, 2015; 2016; Henry, 2019; Offutt-Chaney, 2019).

These race-evasive discourses often obscure racial segregation (Blokland and Harding, 2014, p. 132) by 'using geography as a code for race' to 'talk indirectly about racially minoritised students' (Jabbar *et al*, 2022, p. 505). In England, the flagship "no excuses" Mossbourne Community Academy markets itself as an 'oasis in the desert' (Kulz, 2013; 2014), which carries racial and spatial meaning through its implied binary counterpoint. Ladson-Billings (1998) argues that conceptual categories often denote a race binary: 'school achievement' and 'intelligence' denote Whiteness, for example, while 'gangs' and 'welfare recipients' (p. 9) denote Blackness. Using this, we may challenge Mossbourne's

oasis and *desert* binary as similarly racially loaded despite adopting an ostensibly colour-evasive stance.

For many, the term 'urban' also operates to denote race (Picower, 2009; Milner, 2012; Hernández, 2022; Williams *et al*, 2022). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) explain that:

The term *urban*, the root word of *urbane*, has come to mean black. Thus, urban schools (located in the urbane, sophisticated cities) lack the status and reputation of suburban (white) schools and when urban students move to or are bused to suburban schools, these schools lose their reputation. (p. 60, author's emphasis)

Williams *et al* (2022) argue that the urban discourse 'describes the racialised *experience* [authors' emphasis] and inequitable education conditions that minoritised students encounter' as much as it does 'a high density of Black and Brown bodies' (p. 455), a point many others concur with (Picower, 2009; Milner, 2012; Hernández, 2022). Because urban spaces are often publicly imagined alongside criminality, damage, and depravity (Williams *et al*, 2021, p. 474; Hernández, 2022, p. 22), urban discourses constitute a colour-evasive way of talking about racial deficit.

This racial coding is also represented in English urban geographies: the government's demographic data (Defra, 2023) — collected in England in 2020 — highlights a clear difference between the 96.9% White population of rural areas and the 81.7% White and 18.3% 'minority ethnic group' urban demographic. The way the government explicitly juxtaposes the ethnic demographics of the urban and rural illustrates the latent meanings of both geographical designations. This UK urban demographic segregation has been empirically observed by others too (Warrington, 2005; Wilson and Burgess, 2007; Kulz, 2013; 2014). Thus, *urban* represents race not just as a latent discourse but in reality too; thus we can reasonably assume that “no excuses” urban geography references are racially coded, even if not intentionally.

This is important because “no excuses” are saturated with expressions of urban — and therefore racialised — geography. The US “no excuses” is a predominantly urban phenomenon (e.g. Sondel, 2016; Sondel, Kretchmar and Dunn, 2019; Golann, 2021) justified with a racialised *urban* mission (Golann, 2021, p. 136) and with tangible segregating effects (Yazdiha, 2022). With no such research on English “no excuses” apparent in the literature, gathering and challenging the geographical expression of the model on this side of the Atlantic is vital and timely. Thus, taking an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates both racial and geographical tools and lenses will be a suitable endeavour in this study. The literature indicates to what extent this is possible and how such an interdisciplinary examination might be approached.

Racial segregation research offers some direction. While not necessarily mappable, racial segregation is keenly felt. In 1903, Du Bois (2008) described feeling the colour-lines that separated Black and White people in southern US towns, a phenomenon noted by Blaut's (1974) description of the 'perfectly well-delineated territory' (p. 40) of the ghettos and barrios in 1970s Chicago. On these terms, space is racialised via the felt borders that connote the liminality between two spatial categories (Ford, 1992; Kulz, 2014; Roy, 2016; Kobayashi and Peake, 2000). For Du Bois (2008), the liminality was between Black and White areas whereas for Blaut (1974), it was between *ghetto* and *not ghetto*. Indeed, in concurrence with Ladson-Billing's (1998) assertion that race is constructed through binaries, *urban* and its near-cognates are often framed with an opposite; whether as an *urban/rural* binary (Roy, 2016, p. 814), as an *urban/leafy suburbs* binary (Kulz, 2014, pp. 689-690) or where 'urban' and 'ghetto' are the 'putative opposite[s]' of 'safe' White neighbourhoods (Kobayashi and Peake, 2000, p. 396), *urban* antonyms also indicate racial coding. Examining English "no excuses" rhetoric for their use of such terms will, therefore, be an appropriate way to understand how any geographical expression of "no excuses" might be felt.

Because space is so loaded with racial meaning it can be considered an expression of power (Delaney, 2002; Vélez and Solórzano, 2018), or even as a technology of power (Ford, 1992; Chari, 2008; Yazdih, 2022). Racialised organisations reproduce racial logics through geography by enhancing or diminishing racial agency, legitimising resource inequality and decoupling discourses of race from inequality (Ray, 2019; Stewart, García and Petersen,

2021; Yazdiha, 2022, Milner, 2012; Williams *et al*, 2022). Race is also evident in the geographies of containment, where criminalising and pathologising justifications — as noted earlier — contain those that are considered ‘contaminates’ (Williams *et al*, 2021, p. 474; Price, 2010) between and within cities and schools (Smith and Stovall, 2008; Hernández, 2022; Yazdiha, 2022), including in schools’ internal exclusionary spaces (Sondel, 2016; Stanforth and Rose, 2020). Indeed, some have described the segregating effect of “no excuses” schools as supporting White supremacy (Kulz, 2013; Sondel, Kretchmar and Dunn, 2019, p. 3).

The spatial expression of racial power is a key component in colonisation (Blaut, 1974; Goldberg, 1994; Kobayashi and Peake, 2000; Mignolo, 2012) but also plays an important role in the ongoing process of internal colonisation (Harris, 1972; Blaut, 1974; Turner, 2018), described as a technology for constituting and dominating problem populations within a nation (Turner, 2018). Others consider economic exploitation to be a feature of an internal colony (Harris, 1972; Blaut, 1974). However it is defined and conceived, internal colonisation reinforces how urban areas are sites of struggle for racial meaning and equality (Kobayashi and Peake, 2000; Chang and Chiang, 2023). Turner (2018, p. 771) draws on Cowen and Lewis (2016) to illustrate this, arguing that internal (neo)colonialism operates to configure Black people as ‘killable, walled in and regulated’, the latter of which includes ‘militarised policing [and] zero tolerance’. In this way, examining whether or how policymakers might express their power relationships through processes of internal colonisation might be a fruitful approach in this study.

Through these various ways of conceptualising racialised geographies, it becomes clear that geographical landscapes are texts of sorts that are apt to be read (Price, 2010). Combining the disciplines of geography, education and race research to take on such an endeavour has precedence. Chris Taylor, for example, has taken a quantifiable, mappable approach to exploring the relationships between space, power and social justice (Taylor and Gorard, 2001; Taylor, 2009a; 2009b; Power and Taylor, 2013) and David Stovall has explored how race and power relationships are expressed spatially through education and how we might challenge this (Smith and Stovall, 2008; Stovall, 2006; 2010; 2018; Horsford *et al*, 2019). These theoretical and empirical approaches offer a useful basis for this study to consider the geographical growth and expression of “no excuses” in England.

2.3 Critical Race Theory

We require a secure theoretical grounding to ensure such an interdisciplinary approach can succeed. As we have explored in this chapter, there is a growing body of critical literature around “no excuses”, especially regarding race, an issue I am compelled to examine further in the model’s growth and establishment in England from a critical perspective. Critical Race Theory (CRT) allows me to develop this aspect of the critique that is absent from the English expression of the model. In this section, I will outline the key theoretical concepts within CRT, paying close attention to the core tenets of White supremacy and the centrality of

race before briefly considering some critiques of CRT. Finally, I will define this study's research questions, which are theoretically informed by CRT.

CRT is concerned with 'the relationship among race, racism and power' (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001, p. 2) and, in particular, with 'business-as-usual racism' rather than racism that 'stands out' (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001, p. xvi; Gillborn, 2006b). Because '[r]acism takes many forms', Gillborn (2006b, p. 13) argues that 'anti-racism must be flexible and constantly adapt'; as such, CRT does not present a 'finished set of propositions that claim to explain current situations and predict what will occur under a certain set of conditions' (Gillborn, 2005, p. 19).

Originating from Critical Legal Studies, CRT now has a strong presence in education (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Gillborn, 2006b; Capper, 2015; Johnson, 2018) and has been used to examine a range of education issues including curriculum, assessment and desegregation (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Because of these affordances, CRT is a valuable lens to examine "no excuses".

2.3.1 Critical Race Theory tenets

While 'there is no canonical set of doctrines or methodologies' for CRT (Crenshaw *et al*, 1995, p. xiii) and while CRT has a flexible and pluralistic nature not bound to epistemological boundaries (Tate, 1997; Gillborn, 2005), key proponents describe some important tenets (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Gillborn, 2006b; Capper, 2015). Rollock and Gillborn's (2011) concise, UK-

oriented primer offers five core tenets which are particularly useful and which I summarise below:

1. **Centrality of racism:** racism is normal and so deeply entrenched in society that it is taken for granted; racism does not require direct intentions and is apparent in racist outcomes.
2. **White supremacy:** the normalising of White privilege, which saturates society and its institutions and which enables White dominance and non-White subordination.
3. **Voices of people of colour:** the voices and experiences of people of colour allow a way to speak back about racism for psychic preservation; as such, these are central to CRT and allow for narratives and counter-narratives.
4. **Interest convergence:** Because of White supremacy, White people have little incentive to eradicate racism and will tend to work toward racial equality only when it converges with White interests.
5. **Intersectionality:** Race and racism exist in structures that also disadvantage and exclude according to other identities; because individuals have multiple identities, people can experience these injustices in multiple ways.

While all of these tenets might afford excellent means to analyse and explore “no excuses” schooling, it is the centrality of racism and white supremacy that offer the strongest potential for analytical and explanatory power in this study. The

former is particularly useful because it provides a means to theoretically draw out racist constitutions of “no excuses”, even where they might be largely invisible because of their ingrained nature. The latter, White supremacy, offers the theoretical means to examine such racism in relation to any racialising functions of “no excuses”. I will explore these tenets in more detail in the following section.

Some tenets, however, are out of the purview of this study. For example, while a core part of CRT, the storytelling and counter-narrative tenet would not be an appropriate theoretical basis. While some CRT scholars argue that we should ‘push back against *majoritarian stories*’ [author’s emphasis] (Capper, 2015, p. 796) which ‘tell stories, [...] about merit, causation, blame, responsibility, and social justice’ but which ‘do not seem to them like stories at all, but the truth’ (Delgado, 1993, p. 666) with counternarratives, these would be the narratives and stories of a White doctoral candidate challenging White narratives (which I explore in Chapter Three, section 3.3.3), and would therefore not be within the spirit of the tenet as described by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), Ladson-Billings (1998) and Rollock and Gillborn (2011), for example.

2.3.2 White supremacy and the centrality of racism

For Ansley (1997, p. 592), White supremacy is:

a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are

widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings. (p. 592)

White supremacy is neither aberrant nor anomalous; instead, it is the logical conclusion of European White domination (Mills, 1997; Lipsitz, 2023). While it includes White supremacist hate groups, White supremacy is far more insidious, ubiquitous and pervasive (Gillborn, 2014); its everyday ordinariness makes it particularly challenging to identify and confront (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Rollock and Gillborn, 2011).

Because racism and White supremacy are so ingrained and entrenched in society, they are apparent at all levels of education (Rollock and Gillborn, 2011; Gillborn, 2014). Gillborn (2005) argues that education policy itself can be viewed as an act of White supremacy, even without direct intention:

[A]lthough race inequity may not be a planned and deliberate goal of education policy neither is it accidental. The patterning of racial advantage and inequity is structured in domination and its continuation represents a form of tacit intentionality on the part of white powerholders and policymakers. (p. 485)

For Gillborn (2005), failing to look for, measure and address racial inequalities amounts to a *de facto* acceptance of them or 'tacit intentionality' (p. 499), making

it the 'most dangerous form of white supremacy' because it takes for granted the 'routine privileging of white interests that goes unremarked in the political mainstream' (p. 485). Moreover, because '[e]very system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets' (Kendall, 2013, p. xix, quoted in Gillborn, 2014, p. 28), racist educational outcomes can be considered part of the very design of the education system. Thus, while apparently absent from overt educational discourse, White supremacy's influence in — for example — policy, curriculum, assessment, pedagogy, and teacher attitudes (e.g. Kailin, 1999; Gillborn, 2005; 2010; 2014; Vaught and Castagno, 2008; Picower, 2009; Sondel, Kretchmar and Dunn, 2019; Lipsitz, 2023) renders it a constant absent presence (Apple, 1999). For Ledesma and Calderón (2015), the White supremacy at the heart of education policy 'is central to shaping school climate'. To examine a school system with a distinct racialised climate and outcomes (Lack, 2009; Sondel, 2015b; Lopez Kershen, Weiner and Torres, 2018; Golann, 2021; Jabbar *et al*, 2022; James-Gallaway, 2022), White supremacy is an appropriate theoretical tool.

One of the core problems with examining Whiteness is that Whiteness does not let itself be seen (Leonardo, 2002). Because White people benefit most from systematic racism, they have little incentive to acknowledge or challenge it overtly (Leonardo, 2004). Thus, Whiteness thrives by misrepresenting the world and the role Whiteness plays in racial domination (Leonardo, 2004). In British education, Bain (2018) characterises this as '*White ignorance*', where Whiteness produces falsehoods to protect White supremacy, creating an epistemology of ignorance. Elsewhere, it has been characterised as White ambivalence (Lensmire, 2010; Lensmire and Snaza, 2010). While *ignorance* and *ambivalence* imply passivity,

Picower (2009) opts for the phrase 'tools of Whiteness', which highlights the 'active protection of [...] White supremacy' (p. 197) ideologically (such as through colour-evasive assertions), performatively (such as the 'I just want to help' (p. 209) discourse) and emotionally.

The latter is an enduring theme in the Whiteness literature. It is manifest in the fear that drives racialised discipline (Baggett and Andrzejewski, 2020), White teacher identity (Lensmire, 2010), and general White collective identity (Outten *et al*, 2012), and it is represented in the White guilt underpinning '*White knight*' discourses (Allen, 2004, p. 128) and the hidden curriculum of Whiteness (Leonardo, 2004). White fragility and sensitivity move attention away from White domination and reinforce the supremacy of White discourses, reaffirming its own privilege (Leonardo, 2004). Whatever form it takes, though, the White emotional response is a barrier to reform (Leonardo, 2004; Lipsitz, 2023).

Colour-evasiveness — part of Picower's (2009) ideological 'tools of Whiteness' — is an important means to assuage White emotional fragility while mobilising White supremacy. Racist ideologies do not require overt racial discourses. Colour-evasiveness was originally described by Bonilla-Silva (2014) as 'colourblindness', where 'whites enunciate positions that safeguard their racial interests without sounding "racist"' (p. 4). As part of a 'colour-blind drama' (p.17), Whiteness' "'smiling face" discrimination' (p. 3) sets paths for misinterpreting and acts as an elastic ideological wall (p. 305) which is challenging to identify and even more challenging to fight. However, Annamma, Jackson and Morrison (2017) prefer the term *colour-evasiveness*; not only does 'blindness' imply ableist,

deficit notions that ignore blind people's unique way of understanding the world, but it implies passivity. Colour-evasiveness, on the other hand, highlights the active agency involved in evading race discourses.

Race-evasiveness serves many functions. Firstly, it serves Whiteness by obscuring White complicity in systematic inequality and inequity (Leonardo, 2002; Vaught and Castagna, 2008; Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Gillborn, 2019a). It constitutes the kind of oppressive epistemology that means Whiteness cannot be seen (Leonardo, 2002; Bain, 2018) while enabling Whiteness to gain legitimacy through its hiddenness (Vaught and Castagna, 2008).

Race-evasiveness also serves to denote false virtue by implying that acknowledging race is in-and-of-itself a racist practice and that colour-evasiveness is thus morally superior (Annamma, Jackson and Morrison, 2017; Gillborn, 2019a). It is a proudly declared part of White identity (Hartmann *et al*, 2017) and is often couched in religious terms (Picower, 2009). That race-evasiveness is empirically observed to be most apparent in relation to normative pressure and associated with a strong desire to self-present without bias (Apfelbaum, Norton and Summers, 2012) further illustrates its false status as a virtue. However, the inculcation of race-evasiveness in education means that children themselves are likely to believe it is an effective tool for reducing bias (Apfelbaum, Norton and Summers, 2012).

However, framing racial ignorance as virtuous is as callous as it is disingenuous; as a frame legitimised by and only available to Whiteness (Bain, 2018), it does not preclude the possibility of this ignorance being purposely cultivated. However constituted, in matters of race, ignorance is inadequate; failure to look for and address racial inequality renders a person, organisation or policy as tacitly intentional (Gillborn, 2005; 2006b).

While colour-evasiveness soothes White fragility, neurosis and guilt (Allen, 2004; Leonardo, 2004; Lensmire, 2010; Baggett and Andrzejewski, 2020, p. 76), its ubiquity in education — and specifically school policy framing (e.g. Hernández, 2022; Penner *et al*, 2019; Goldin, Duane and Khasnabis, 2022; Tefera, Siegel-Hawley and Sjogren, 2022; Allbright *et al*, 2023; Attaya and Hilliard, 2023; Stewart-Hall, Langham and Miller, 2023) — makes its identification and analysis an important part of addressing systemic racism in education. Colour-evasiveness as a theoretical lens has been used in studies in the UK for precisely this purpose and has highlighted its prevalence in — for example — exclusions of Black pupils in English schools (Stewart-Hall, Langham and Miller, 2023), in the attitudes of English school leadership teams (Stewart-Hall *et al*, 2022) and dealing with racist incidents in a London school (Pearce, 2013). Because of its role in mobilising White supremacy and its application in other UK education studies, colour-evasiveness is an important lens through which to examine “no excuses” policy rhetoric.

Gillborn (2019b) is less convinced by the White fragility argument, arguing that Whiteness contrives itself to be fragile to mask its power, resilience, and active

resistance to challenge (p. 98). Within this is Whiteness' power to look within itself to oppress and maintain its superiority (Allen, 2009; Gillborn, 2019b). In education discourses, this is apparent in the way the media frames White people — particularly poor White boys — as victims in their headlines, while also attacking poor Whites 'as a threatening and degenerate presence' (Gillborn 2010b, p. 7). Crawford (2019), too, has found similar class-based discourses within Whiteness. Using a QuantCrit approach (which we will explore in more detail in Chapter Three), she analysed statistics to challenge the notion that White working-class boys are 'the new oppressed'. She argued that 'knowing misrepresentations of quantitative data are at the heart of an institutional process' that hides how 'White boys continue to enjoy achievement advantages over numerous minoritised groups' (p. 423).

The battle for domination within Whiteness itself described in this literature creates an additional barrier for those trying to challenge White supremacy. Allen (2004) argues that even those who oppress themselves are likely to be also oppressed by another group and elsewhere, he describes the White hegemonic alliance where non-poor Whites dominate and oppress poor Whites who accept their lot in the tacit understanding that it affords them 'race-based benefits that people of colour do not receive' (Allen, 2009, p. 218). This leads to them asking questions such as *What about poor White people?* as a discursive decoy and is also manifest in the interest convergence of the White working-class degenerate rhetoric that saturates the British media (Gillborn, 2010b). It also leads to a reluctance to become what Allen (2009) refers to as *race traitors*, as to do so would constitute *race suicide* (p. 218). Moreover, even when Whites want to

support anti-racism, they are blocked through social and institutional pressures (Picower, 2009; Graham, 2017; Steward, Garcia, Petersen, 2021; Waychunas, 2022). So, whether through the carrot of race-based benefits or the stick of race suicide (Allen, 2009), for Whiteness to preserve itself, it ‘seduces allies’ (Leonardo, 2002, p. 41) through its narratives.

For this study, such a theoretical perspective holds great value. We have already seen that “no excuses” discourses — and education discourses generally — employ colour-evasive language that hides race and racism. Thus, exploring whether Whiteness looks to exploit itself to maintain White supremacy with “no excuses” is an appropriate theoretical lens, as Allen (2009), Gillborn (2010b), and Crawford (2019) have shown in their studies.

2.3.3 CRT critiques

While the many tenets and tools of CRT will provide useful lenses to examine the racialised nature of “no excuses”, it is important to acknowledge the various critiques of CRT, both theoretical and practical.

Theoretically, CRT’s detractors have challenged the relative absence of economic insight (Cole, 2009; Darder and Torres, 2004). Cole (2009) rebuts CRT’s Black-White binary (p. 16) for lumping together poor Whites, billionaires, and other victims of non-colour-coded racism, such as Irish and Roma Gypsy Traveller communities (p. 251), which he asserts alienates Whites against anti-racism. He, and Darder and Torres (2004) both bemoan any examination CRT’s

perceived failure to engage with economic theories, despite accounts such as Allen's (2009) White hegemonic alliance. Subotnik (1998), however, employs *reductio ad absurdum* to argue that CRT's 'culture of complaint' is tantamount to a 'conspiracy theory' (p. 701) and 'madness' (p. 687) and that CRT cannot be satisfied with any corrective racial economic adjustment. As we explored in the last few paragraphs of the previous section, such a critique is important if we are to explore concepts such as the White hegemonic alliance (Allen, 2009) in the growth and establishment of English "no excuses".

Many practical critiques come from within CRT itself, where scholars such as Gillborn (2006b) argue that anti-racism risks becoming a 'meaningless slogan' (p. 11) if not coupled with action. Ledesma and Calderón (2015) support this view and urge us to look towards praxis that addresses the 'entrenched nature of White supremacy' (p. 208) through educational research. Thus, in undertaking this research, I need to consider its practical implications, a topic I take up in Chapter Six, the conclusion.

CRT has also not been accepted by policymakers who have been variously described in the US as leading a 'campaign to ban CRT in education' (Lipsitz, 2023, p. 543) and operating a *de facto* frontlash where detractors preempt and 'take advantage of moments of political anxieties, moral panics, financial precarity, and now pandemics to erode public reckonings to pitchforks, tiki torches, and legislative action' (Zelnick, Kim and Goodking, 2023, p. 170). This frontlash is evident in the responses of parents to CRT in the US, who are scared of CRT's potential to shame their child, inculcate a victim mentality in children

and create racial divisions (Tierra, 2023). However, as Lipsitz (2023) reminds us, banning CRT in education ‘establishes that the privilege of whiteness means never having to take anti-racist arguments seriously’ (p. 545).

One final critique concerns not the theory itself but who is able to research within the theory. Bergerson (2003) highlights the colonising tendencies of Whiteness and argues that White researchers might themselves colonise CRT, appropriating it in the process. Subutnik’s (1998) scathing rejoinder to CRT also highlights a lack of White scholarship as a major weakness. However, ignoring issues of race in White research risks complicity and tacit intentionality (Gillborn, 2005; 2006b). As such, I have a responsibility to use my White privilege to ask difficult questions and challenge the status quo while not overreaching and using CRT as a ‘method for “understanding” the experiences of people of colour’ (Bergerson, 2003, p. 59). This is a key part of my own positionality, which I explore further in Chapter Three, section 3.3.3.

2.4 Research questions

The research reviewed in this chapter describes the racialisation at the heart of “no excuses”, but the research is very much oriented on the US. With its recontextualisation in England, I wish to examine whether the English expression of “no excuses” is similarly racist. Therefore, I propose this overarching research question (RQ):

Is the growth and establishment of “no excuses” schools in England racist?

Gillborn (2005) offers three deceptively simple questions that will help me tackle this question:

First, the question of priorities: who or what is driving education policy?

Second, the question of beneficiaries: who wins and who loses as a result of education policy priorities? And finally, the question of outcomes: what are the effects of policy? (p. 492)

To address the first of these questions, ‘Who or what is driving education policy?’, I will need to explore the public discourses surrounding “no excuses”. Thus, I propose the first sub-question:

RQ1 What public discourses surround “no excuses” schools?

As we explored earlier, however, race is often elided from education policy, and misrecognised where it is included. Gillborn (2005) implores us to look ‘beyond the expressed intent of policymakers and practitioners to examine how policy works in the real world’ (p. 492). As race is expressed spatially (Kobayashi, 2004), looking at the geographical patterns of “no excuses” will enable me to compare

the reality with the DfE's overt intent. Therefore, I propose this second sub-question:

RQ2 Is there a racial pattern to the geography of “no excuses” schools?

This question will move me closer to exploring any racialised functions of the government's “no excuses” discourses explored in response to RQ1. Apple (1999) decouples the ‘intention’ and ‘function’ (p. 10) of education reform, analogous to Gillborn's (2005; 2006b) ‘tacit intentionality’. Similarly, Diem *et al* (2014) urge us to pay attention to ‘the difference between policy rhetoric and practised reality’ (p. 1072). To address both these concerns, I propose RQ3:

RQ3 How does the “no excuses” policy function in rhetoric and reality?

By answering these questions, I can address the overarching research question. In the next chapter, I outline how I will address these questions using CRT as a theoretical framework and Critical Discourse Analysis, Critical Policy Analysis and QuantCrit as methodological tools.

Chapter 3: Methodology

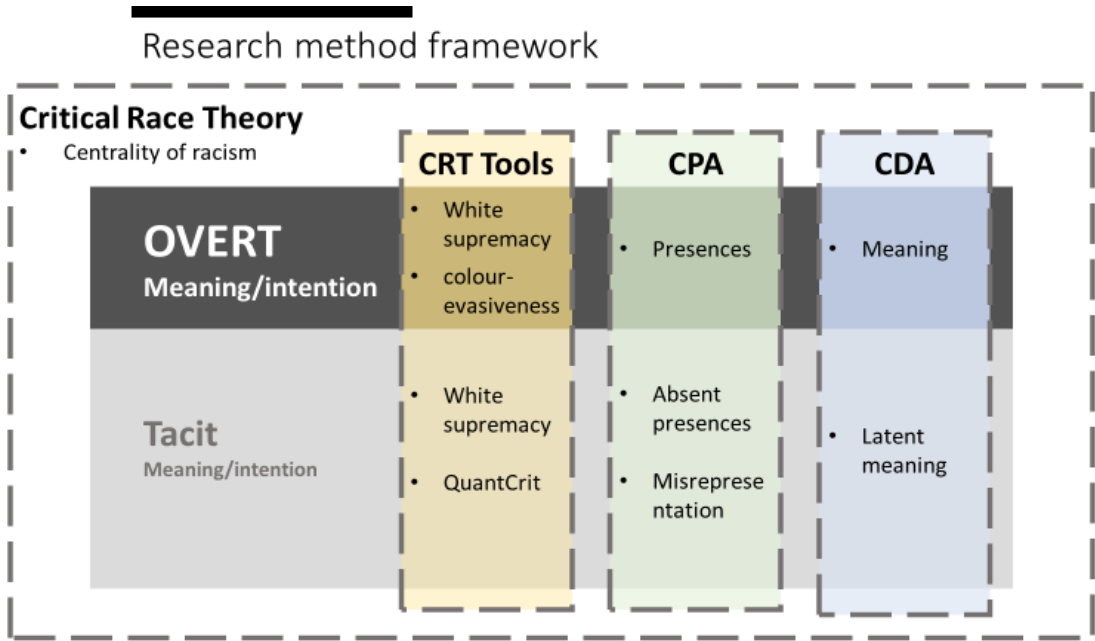
3.1 Introduction

Despite racism's centrality pervading society, its hiddenness makes it hard to challenge, thus reinforcing its power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Gillborn, 2006b). These absent presences (Apple, 1999) of race, therefore, are likely to only be discernable through their latent functions, or as Apple frames it, through the separation of 'intentional and functional explanations', where the latter 'are concerned with the latent effects of policies and practices' (p. 10). All language has hidden meaning, manifesting in everyday metaphors and analogies (Mullet, 2018). Thus, to explore whether the growth and establishment of "no excuses" are racist — and address the overarching research question — we need to look beyond the overt intentions and functions of the policy.

Figure 3.1 (over) illustrates the theoretical framework I will employ to examine these latent absent presences that underpin and are underpinned by CRT's Centrality of Racism. This tenet posits that while neither aberrant nor anomalous (Mills, 1997; Lipsitz, 2023), it pervades society (Rollock and Gillborn, 2011; Gillborn, 2014). This strongly normative assumption, therefore, acts as a lens through which to analyse the data. To unpack the latent meanings and intentions, I will use the CRT concepts and tools of White supremacy, colour-evasiveness and QuantCrit, as well as principles of Critical Policy Analysis (CPA) — namely '*absent presences*' (Apple, 1999) and misrepresentation (Apple, 1999; Gillborn,

2005; Ahmed, 2006; Sullivan, Larke and Webb-Hasan, 2010; Lingard, Creagh and Vass, 2012) — and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

Figure 3.1: This study’s theoretical framework to uncover latent racial intent and meaning.



In the first half of this chapter, I will outline my methodological approach *in theory* and justify it by constructing a theoretical framework; this constitutes my methodological considerations and justification. In the second half, I will outline how this will look *in practice* and explore how I will identify, collect, and analyse the data to address each research question; this constitutes my method explication.

Throughout, I will argue that taking an interdisciplinary approach and combining race, education, and geography is an appropriate way to analyse “no excuses” in England.

3.2 Methodology *in theory*

The theoretical framework in Figure 3.1 represents my attempt to consider the concepts at the heart of my research. A theoretical framework allows a researcher to identify their ‘disciplinary orientation’ (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 85), the literature framing their study, and the concepts that both ‘generate the problem of the study’ (p. 86) and enable appropriate analysis. In doing so, theoretical frameworks define ‘the epistemological and methodological assumptions behind the research’ (Hammond, 2020, p. 116) and thus provide the basis for others to check the reliability and validity of a study and judge its value (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 270). Because of their necessarily normative assumptions (van Dijk, 1993) and to help readers understand the power relations within the research, critical approaches benefit significantly from theoretical frameworks (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 59).

CRT’s centrality of racism tenet (explored in Chapter Two, section 2.3.2) is the core concept of this study. It posits that racism is ingrained, natural and thus difficult to challenge (Rollock and Gillborn, 2011; Gillborn, 2014). Hence, my analyses will explore the possibility that racism is present within the data I collect and underpins the overarching question, ‘Is the growth and establishment of “no excuses” schools in England racist?’ I explore this in more detail in the next section.

Because there is often a disconnect between overt and tacit meaning (Apple, 1999; Gillborn, 2005), I will explore the specific overt orientation of the qualitative

data, comparing and contrasting it against the latent meaning and intentions of both qualitative and quantitative data. The columns in Figure 3.1 represent the specific tools and theoretical lenses with which I will challenge the data — CRT, CDA and CPA. Each of these is discussed in further detail later in this chapter. Table 3.1 (over) illustrates how I will apply each tool or lens to each research question.

Table 3.1: The theoretical and methodological framework for addressing each research question.

	Overarching question: Is the growth and establishment of “no excuses” schools in the UK racist?		
	RQ1 What public discourses surround “no excuses” schools?	RQ2 Is there a racial pattern to the geography of “no excuses” schools?	RQ3 How does the “no excuses” policy function in rhetoric and reality?
Data	Qualitative: DfE “no excuses” content	Qualitative: DfE “no excuses” content Quantitative: DfE census data	Qualitative: DfE “no excuses” content Quantitative: DfE census data
Critical Race Theory tools	Centrality of racism * White supremacy * Colourevasiveness *	Centrality of racism * White supremacy * Colourevasiveness * QuantCrit **	Centrality of racism * White supremacy * Colourevasiveness * QuantCrit **
Critical Policy Analysis	Presences *	Presences Absent presences ***	Presences Absent presences ***
Critical Discourse Analysis	Overt meaning Latent meaning ****	Overt meaning Latent meaning ****	Overt meaning Latent meaning ****

* DeCuir-Gunby, J.T., Chapman, T.K. and Schutz, P.A (2018a) ‘1: Critical Race Theory, racial justice and education’, in DeCuir-Gunby, J.T., Chapman, T.K. and Schutz, P.A *Understanding Critical Race Research Methods and Methodologies*. Abingdon, Oxon: Taylor & Francis, pp. 1-10.

** Crawford, C.E., Demack, S., Gillborn, D. and Warmington, P. (2018) ‘11: Quants and crits: using numbers for social justice (or, how not to be lied to with statistics)’, in DeCuir-Gunby, J.T., Chapman, T.K. and Schutz, P.A *Understanding Critical Race Research Methods and Methodologies*. Abingdon, Oxon: Taylor & Francis, pp. 124-137.

*** Apple, M.W. (1999) ‘The absent presence of race in educational reform’, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 2 (1), pp. 9-16.

**** Mullet, D.R. (2018) ‘A general critical discourse analysis framework for educational research’, *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 29 (2), pp.116-142.

3.2.1 Theoretical framework: CRT

The central logic at the heart of my theoretical framework is the centrality of racism (Rollock and Gillborn, 2011; Gillborn, 2014). Many CRT researchers place this tenet at the heart of their research. DeCuir and Dixson (2004), for example, argue that ‘CRT implies that race should be the centre of focus and charges researchers to critique school practices and policies that are both overtly and covertly racist’ (p. 30). Thus, CRT is an appropriate theoretical basis to challenge the growth and establishment of CRT. Ladson-Billings (2000) also argues that the two main concerns of CRT, White supremacy and the subordination of people of colour, should be a core part of any qualitative research that employs the theory.

To do this, we must unmask the ways Whiteness oppresses through ‘the co-option and distortion of oppositional discourses’ that pervades education policymaking (DeCuir and Dixson, 2004, p. 30); researchers must identify and challenge dominant discourses that racially subordinate (Solorzano and Yosso, 2001; Milner, 2013). This study’s research questions seek to do precisely that, and CRT’s imperative to foreground the centrality of racism will underpin my analysis of this data.

Placing theory — and in particular, the tenets of the centrality of racism and White supremacy — at the heart of this study avoids what Treviño, Harris and Wallace (2008) describe as the ‘loose hodgepodge of analytic tools that are frequently used in a catch-as-catch-can manner’ (p. 9) that can blight CRT research. In

response to Treviño, Harris and Wallace, Cabrera (2018) argues that it is also vital to consider hegemonic Whiteness as part of the ‘intellectual architecture’ that underpins racial oppression. Because race is a constantly shifting epistemology and because dominant forces continuously change the way they racialise (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Bain, 2018), examining the way Whiteness positions itself is of critical importance. Within education, this means exploring racism in, for example, curriculum, instructional methods, assessment and funding, and examining the way categories are reified and manipulated (Ladson-Billings, 1998). As such, I will take care to highlight how White supremacy operates to racialise itself and its racial objects through “no excuses”.

To avoid the ‘hodgepodge of analytic tools’ warned of by Treviño, Harris and Wallace (2008, p. 9), before exploring the theoretical tools I will use, I will first explore how Critical Race scholars deploy CRT as an analytical tool and how it may differ from the theory as a whole; in doing so, it will set the context for my own interdisciplinary CRT approach. Gillborn (2006b) makes the distinction between the defining elements of CRT — including the element, ‘racism as endemic... “normal” not aberrant nor rare’ (p. 20) — and conceptual tools which comprise ‘story-telling and counter-stories’, ‘interest convergence’, and ‘critical white studies’ (p. 20). Following Gillborn (2006b), this study’s theoretical framework also separates the underpinning logic of the centrality of racism from CRT as a tool, as illustrated in Figure 3.1. However, this study differs from Gillborn’s conceptualisation in that it uses White supremacy, colour-evasiveness,

and QuantCrit as its CRT tools, the latter of which is not contemporaneous with Gillborn's 2006 paper.

Other scholars differ from Gillborn and consider CRT's variously described tenets as lenses to examine social phenomena such as policies and educational practice (DeCuir and Dixson, 2004; Ledesma and Calderón, 2015). In particular, counter-narratives and interest convergence have been successful tools within education (DeCuir and Dixson, 2004; Milner, 2008; Park and Liu, 2014; Davis, 2019). However, employing counter-narrative as a tool is outside the purview of this study as it would require access to the voices of people of colour. This was not a possibility for this study because of the COVID restrictions and funding restrictions.

However, many scholars urge us to use CRT as a whole as an analysis tool to challenge majoritarian narratives (Capper, 2015; Ledesma and Calderón, 2015), libertarian colourblindness and its 'token commitment to diversity' (DeCuir and Dixson, 2004, p. 29); as such we are urged to use CRT 'to unpack, shed light on, problematise, disrupt, and analyse how systems of oppression, marginalisation, racism, inequity, hegemony, and discrimination [pervade] policies, practices, institutions, and systems in education' (Milner, 2013, p. 1). In considering the relationship between overt and tacit meaning and intentions (Gillborn, 2005) and presences and absent presences (Apple, 1999) in "no excuses" — as illustrated in Figure 3.1 — I may challenge majoritarian narratives and their role in maintaining the centrality of racism and White supremacy. In the next sections, I will explore briefly how the CRT literature conceives the analysis of qualitative

and quantitative data and how this influences my theoretical framework and the way I approach each research question (as illustrated in Table 3.1).

3.2.1.a Qualitative methods in CRT

Critical race theory is strongly associated with qualitative methods (Ladson-Billings, 2000; DeCuir and Dixon, 2004). This is evident in the prevalent use of the counternarrative tool illustrated in the previous chapter. CRT research often involves exploring ‘racialised discourses and ethnic epistemologies’ (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 257) and the ways racialised systems of knowing reify racial realities. As such, we are urged to challenge mainstream orthodoxies (Ladson-Billings, 2000) and scrutinise all texts created by Whites to understand ‘their political race implications’ (Allen, 2009, p. 213). In the context of this study, this would include the DfE’s “no excuses” texts. The unmediated content from their website offers the purest manifestation of the discourses they wish to share with the public, unmediated by those outside the DfE.

Examining the texts will help reveal the DfE’s discursive orientations: when the DfE talk about “no excuses”, what are they saying? How does what they say frame race? Does this create the conditions for any racialised patterns of “no excuses”? Capper (2015), in particular, urges us to explore the majoritarian narratives within such texts:

Pollack and Zirkel explain that Whites use majoritarian narratives to “justify, legitimate, and help to maintain the status quo of racial

inequities (p. 298). Whites use these narratives to explain racial inequities — narratives that are “embedded with racialised omissions, distortions, and stereotypes” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18), deficit thinking, and blame the victim. (pp. 809-810)

By examining the discourses taken from the DfE’s “no excuses” discourses that constitute qualitative data for this study, we can disrupt and unsettle White codes and ‘dismantle the discourses of whiteness’ (Leonardo, 2002, p. 31). With the qualitative data drawn from the DfE, I can answer RQs one — ‘What public discourses surround “no excuses” schools?’ — and three — ‘How does the “no excuses” policy function in rhetoric and reality?’

However, CRT scholars caution about some problems I may encounter when working with such qualitative data. Leonardo (2004) highlights the pitfalls of examining White discourses, particularly White privilege: the ‘renunciation of whiteness [...] does not choke off the flow of institutional privileges that subjects who are constructed as white enjoy’ (p. 137) and ‘[t]he study of white privilege begins to take on an image of domination without agents’ (p. 138). Thus, the study of White discourses might make little positive difference and may even be harmful. With this in mind, my examination of the DfE’s qualitative data must highlight rather than suppress notions of agency.

In addition, I need to be mindful of my own Whiteness and how this interacts with my analysis (Bergerson, 2003). When working with qualitative data, researcher

positionality strongly influences the limits of their analyses. Ladson-Billings (2000) explains that ‘race, ethnicity [...] and other forms of difference work to inform [the knower’s] relationship to knowledge and its production’ (p. 266). In other words, my positionality as a White male will have a critical epistemological influence. I will explore this in more detail later in this chapter, in section 3.3.3.

3.2.1.b Quantitative methods in CRT

In Chapter Two (section 2.2.6.b) we saw how geographical landscapes can be considered texts of sorts that are apt to be read (Price, 2010). In this study, I intend to examine quantitative data as a complementary “text” that we might read to explore the geographical nature of “no excuses” and address RQ2.

However, employing quantitative methods in CRT is fraught with issues and must be navigated very carefully. Sablan (2019) goes as far as saying they are considered by many as ‘antithetical to CRT tenets’ (p. 178). For Lingard (2011), numerical data represents ‘the reductive norm for contemporary education policy at all levels’ (p. 357) and numbers constitute ‘a technology of central governance’ (p. 365). Because of this, CRT traditionally rejects quantitative methods and the positivist paradigm they tool (Sablan, 2019).

A significant issue with quantitative data is its reliance on categories as natural or neutral entities (Crawford, 2019). We have already explored how race is a fluid, contested socially constructed concept (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Gillborn, 2010b; 2018; Gillborn, Warmington, and Demack, 2018). However, CRT views race as

more than just a variable that translates into simple categories and effects (Crawford *et al*, 2018) — it represents ‘a construction, a set of fully social relationships’ (Apple, 2001, p. 204).

Quantitative data also has a troubling history as a tool for oppression. Crawford (2019) notes that dominant groups often deploy numbers for their ostensible scientific authority, and for D’Costa *et al* (2023), they ‘have been used to perpetuate a White supremacy agenda’ (p. 12). Indeed, quantitative data is damningly associated with racial eugenics (Sablan, 2019).

One final issue is that numbers are used to misrecognise and obfuscate racial inequality (Gillborn, Warmington and Demack, 2018). Quantitative analyses are deployed to perpetuate victim-blaming narratives and imply causality, even where there are no reasonable grounds for it (Gillborn, 2010b). Policymakers manipulate statistics through, for example, category manipulation (Lingard, Creagh and Vass, 2012), underaccounting the appearance of racial outcomes while promoting more desirable racial effects (Gillborn, 2010b; Crawford, 2019; Gillborn *et al*, 2021).

With these points in mind, it is easy to see why CRT traditionally rejects quantitative methods. However, educational statistics are rarely questioned (Crawford *et al*, 2018), and even though policymakers profess good intentions, race is often absent from their numbers (Gillborn, Warmington and Demack, 2018). However, even though numbers constitute ‘a technology of central

governance’ (Lingard, 2011, p. 365), we can use quantitative methods to challenge misrepresentations and overcome dominant White narratives, thus helping to dismantle White supremacy (Crawford *et al*, 2018; Crawford, 2019; Sablan, 2019). To do so requires being quantitatively critical (Sablan, 2019) and considering race relations (Garcia, López and Vélez, 2018).

However, I do not intend to use quantitative data alone in this study. Instead, I planned to employ a mixed-methods approach, as advocated by many in the QuantCrit literature (DeCuir-Gunby and Walker-DeVose, 2013; McCoy and Rodricks, 2015; Sablan, 2019; D’Costa *et al*, 2023). For Gillborn, Warmington and Demack (2018), the distinction between quantitative and qualitative data is relatively unhelpful. D’Costa *et al* (2023) argue that we can enrich quantitative data with qualitative data and vice versa. Thomas (2013) points out that just as those investigating a murder would use a mixed methods approach, researchers should follow. This metaphor is apt when placed next to James-Gallaway’s (2022) description of “no excuses” as ‘spirit murdering’ (James-Gallaway, 2022); we cannot afford to leave any methodological stone unturned in challenging this policy.

By taking such an approach, I will be able to examine the DfE’s “no excuses” rhetoric in comparison to its quantifiable reality and, in doing so, answer to the DfE in their positivist terms. Specifically, using quantitative data will enable us to answer RQ2 — ‘Is there a racial pattern to the geography of “no excuses” schools?’ — and RQ3 — ‘How does the “no excuses” policy function in rhetoric and reality?’ Where the DfE makes claims about the growth and establishment of

“no excuses” in the qualitative data, examining the quantifiable data to see if the geographical data matches the rhetoric allows us to speak back to the DfE.

To answer these questions, I intend to further blur the distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods by taking an interdisciplinary geographical perspective. If we consider that landscapes are texts of sorts (Price, 2010), the geographical representation and patterns of “no excuses” within the DfE’s own data are landmarks apt to be read. By employing a geographical perspective, I can bridge the counterproductive distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods (Gillborn, Warmington and Demack, 2018; D’Costa *et al*, 2023): the data can be analysed and “read” together to create a narrative about “no excuses” racialisation that is compatible with CRT.

Other researchers have taken such an interdisciplinary approach. For example, studies have mapped the quantifiable relationships between space, power and social justice (Taylor and Gorard, 2001; Taylor, 2009a; 2009b; Power and Taylor, 2013) and others have argued that we might explore how race and power relationships are expressed spatially through education in order to challenge it (Smith and Stovall, 2008; Stovall, 2006; 2010; 2018; Horsford *et al*, 2019). Thus, taking a mixed method, interdisciplinary approach has precedence and is appropriate in this context.

3.2.2 Methodological tools

So far, I have made the case that quantitative data can support qualitative data to challenge systemic racism made possible by White supremacy. CRT, on its own, offers a great deal of explanatory power and is often used as both a theoretical framework and tool, as we explored earlier. However, we can augment CRT with supplementary tools to achieve similar race-oriented goals. In the following subsections, I will outline the three tools I will use, one within the theoretical boundaries of CRT itself — QuantCrit — and two with shared critical worldviews. In doing so, I will relate them to the research questions outlined in Table 3.1.

3.2.2.a Critical Policy Analysis

Researchers often employ Critical Policy Analysis (CPA) in tandem with CRT (Apple, 2019; Wright, Muñiz and Keffer, 2023; Kelly and Taylor, 2024). According to Apple (2019), CPA is ‘grounded in the belief that it is absolutely crucial to understand the complex connections between education and the relations of dominance and subordination’ (p. 276). For Wright, Muñiz and Keffer (2023), using CPA ‘uncovers the links between discourse, policy language, and racialised practices [...] and the contradictions and uneven distributions of power in policy discourse and texts’ (p. 7). In a study concerned with the racialisation of a growing policy such as this one, CPA is a useful theoretical lens.

As a tool, CPA is often presented as being about asking ‘simple questions’ (Apple, 2019, p. 277). For example, we have already encountered Apple’s (1999)

imperative to question the difference between a policy's intentions and functions to uncover its *absent presences*. Gillborn (2005, p. 492), too, asks three questions about the priorities, beneficiaries and outcomes of policy, and Bradbury (2020, p. 247) proposes a suite of questions in her CRT framework for education policy analysis, challenging policies' contexts of influence, text production and practice.

This latter study illustrates how CPA can work fruitfully with CRT. CPA has been combined with CRT and CDA to challenge education law (Wright, Muñiz and Keffer, 2023), been applied to CRT bans in elementary literary instruction (Kelly and Taylor, 2024), and used to challenge a racialised state-wide finance policy in Texas (Alemán, 2007). Because it is so amenable to quantitative approaches (Apple, 2019) — for example, challenging English assessment data and categories (Bradbury, 2020) and financial allocations (Alemán, 2007) — CPA offers another angle to this study, especially for comparing the quantitative geographical reality to the DfE's qualitative “no excuses” rhetoric, for RQ3.

Finally, because CPA implores us to examine policies' ‘preferred meanings’ and recontextualisation (Apple, 2019, p. 280), it enables us to gain a ‘clear sense of who are important actors in each of the moments of the circuit of cultural production’ and their mobilisations and alliances (p. 282). Indeed, Apple (2019, p. 283) advises us to pay attention to the role of religion in policy and policy actor mobilisation, especially where it concerns evangelical conservatism, a perspective that I draw on in Chapter Five's analysis. These orientations of CPA lend themselves well towards RQ3's examination of policy function.

3.2.2.b Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) represents a range of tools that can be used to analyse texts (van Dijk, 2015). It shares with CRT its *critical* emphasis that assumes a normative stance targeting ‘the power elites that enact, sustain, legitimate, condone or ignore social inequality and injustice’ (van Dijk, 1993, p. 252). As such, it works well with CRT’s tradition of challenging race inequality (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Because ‘[r]acism, as both social practice and ideology, manifests itself discursively’ (Wodak and Reisigl, 2015, p. 576), employing CDA tools to examine racism will help to investigate the overt intentions and tacit meaning and impacts that Apple (1999) and Gillborn (2005) suggest we might explore. CDA is an ‘open process which can be enhanced through dialogue across disciplines and theories’ (Fairclough, 2003, p. 16), so its tools will work in concert with CRT. Indeed, researchers have synthesised CDA and CRT successfully: Aleshire (2014) identified master and counter-narratives in a teaching program in the US and Briscoe and Khalifa (2015) coined the term ‘Critical Race Discourse Analysis’ to examine narratives and counter-narratives for the closure of a Black high school.

CDA places ‘discourse’ at its core. Fairclough (2013) defines discourse as:

- (1) meaning-making as an element of the social process, (2) the language associated with a particular social field or practice (e.g., ‘political discourse’), and (3) a way of construing aspects of the world

associated with a particular social perspective (e.g., a 'neoliberal discourse of globalisation'). (p. 179)

Within this definition, discourses present a dialectic dualism: discourses are not only *constituted* by social reality but are also *constitutive* of social reality (Fairclough, 2003). As such, *discourse* 'constitutes society and culture', 'does ideological work' and 'is historical' (van Dijk, 2015, p. 467). We can consider *discourse* an abstract noun or 'an analytical category describing the vast array of meaning-making resources available to us'; we can also consider it a count noun, as 'a category for identifying particular ways of representing some aspect of social life' (Fairclough, Mulderrig and Wodak, 2011, p.357). In this study, CDA provides tools to examine both conceptions of discourse, considering the DfE's texts as a whole and exploring the racialisation of particular themes within their "no excuses" texts. It enables us to investigate how the "no excuses" discourses are constituted by — but also constitute — racial and social reality. Thus, CDA is an apt toolkit to address RQ1, 'What public discourses surround "no excuses" schools?' and RQ3, 'How does the "no excuses" policy function in rhetoric and reality?'

To examine texts — which do not have to be a physical document (Fairclough, 2003) — we can apply CDA's tools on a macro or micro level. Analysing language on a 'micro-level [...] can help to demonstrate how some of the more macro features of policy discourse, e.g. warrant, legitimation, recontextualisation, and constructed rhetorically' (Hyatt, 2013, p. 842). Machin and Mayr (2012) mirror this sentiment, asserting that language is 'one place where we can observe exactly

how these interests operate' (p. 25). Thus, while CRT offers a comprehensive macro-level theoretical framework, CDA's micro-level tools provide clues to the discursive constitution of and by a racial, social reality.

A few CDA tools are very well suited to examining the DfE texts. First, 'lexical chains' — 'predictable patterns of co-occurrence between words' — present 'cohesive markers of semantic relations' (Fairclough, 2003, p. 94). In contrast, lexical absences — analogous to Apple's (1999) 'absent presences' — indicate dominant ideologies' attempts to omit or suppress ideologies, themes and subjects. Looking for these particular patterns will indicate where any macro-level racialisation might be latently present on the micro, linguistic level.

3.2.2.c QuantCrit

The final tool I will use, QuantCrit, exists within the CRT stable (Garcia, López, and Vélez, 2018; Gillborn, Warmington, and Demack, 2018; D'Costa *et al*, 2023). Other models of critical quantitative methods have been proposed by other Critical Race researchers such as 'quantitative criticism' and 'critical quantitative inquiries' (Tabron and Thomas, 2023). However, because my study explicitly employs CRT as its underlying logic and because other researchers have used it to challenge problematically racialised rhetoric — for example, Crawford's (2019) excoriation of attainment data used to racialise poor White students — QuantCrit is the most appropriate tool.

QuantCrit is built on five fundamental principles (Crawford *et al*, 2018; Crawford, 2019; Garcia, López, and Vélez, 2018; Gillborn, Warmington and Demack, 2018), which I summarise as:

1. *The centrality of racism*: built on the analogous foundational CRT principle where race is both pervasive, socially constructed and unremarkable; thus, it cannot be reliably quantified and is often obscured.
2. *Numbers are not neutral*: quantitative data collection and analysis are not objective acts and reflect the subjectivities of those who collect and analyse quantitative data; thus, quantitative data is susceptible to the racist assumptions of White supremacy.
3. *Categories are neither 'natural' nor given*: racial categories are historically complex and contested; they are mobilised to promote and disguise race inequality and should be challenged.
4. *Voice and insight (data cannot 'speak for itself')*: there is no single correct interpretation of any quantitative data, and quantitative data is interpreted and reinterpreted according to the narratives of those interpreting it; thus, it is susceptible to racialised mobilisation.
5. *Using numbers for social justice*: quantitative data can help to challenge oppression and support social justice, and researchers should commit to using it accordingly.

Despite the tensions between quantitative methods and CRT, QuantCrit's principles supplement CRT as part of a 'principled ambivalence to numbers' (Crawford *et al*, 2018, p. 127). While Sablan (2019) argues that using quantitative

data in CRT has not 'reached its full potential in its combination of theory and method' (p. 179), using QuantCrit to balance numbers with stories helps to bring awareness to obscured racial inequality (D'Costa *et al*, 2023); it gives us tools to work '*with* and *against* numbers' (Crawford *et al*, 2018, my emphases).

As I illustrate in my theoretical framework (Figure 3.1), my central logic is 'the centrality of racism'. This is also the first principle of QuantCrit. This compatibility renders QuantCrit a valuable tool for addressing the overarching research question, 'Is the growth and establishment of "no excuses" schools in England racist?' QuantCrit will also help me to address RQ2 directly, 'Is the growth and establishment of "no excuses" schools in England racist?'; if there is a racialisation of "no excuses" schools, this would be apparent in their demographic profiles, which would contrast against other schools in their local and regional areas. Therefore, I need to collect and analyse such data. Later in this chapter, I will detail the method *in practice*, including how I will collect and analyse this data from the DfE's (2019) school census. Analysing the geographical expression of "no excuses" through their demographic profiles will also allow me to compare the quantifiable reality of "no excuses" to the DfE's rhetoric, thus addressing RQ3, 'How does the "no excuses" policy function in rhetoric and reality?'

To properly adopt QuantCrit as a tool, I must also consider its other principles. First, I will not treat numbers as neutral and able to speak for themselves (principles 2 and 4). I will explicitly address the role race plays in collecting, analysing, and interpreting this quantitative data, including my own race and that of the DfE's. This will allow me to speak to the DfE's claims about "no excuses"

and social justice and challenge their narratives (principle 5). Finally, I will pay attention to how I use categories in this research (principle 3), which I will justify later in this chapter.

Using QuantCrit as I wish to in this study has an established precedence. It was used to challenge the UK government's construction of statistics that positioned White working-class children as a new oppressed category (Crawford, 2019). It has also been employed to examine the differential between Black and White women teachers' evaluations in the US (Campbell, 2023) and also in challenging the 'Sewell Report on Race and Ethnic Disparities' (2021) in the UK (Tikly, 2021). In all three of these studies, the authors have used quantitative data and methods to turn the gaze back onto the racialised constitutions of policies and practices. It is in this manner that QuantCrit is an appropriate and valuable tool for this study.

3.3 Method *in practice*

3.3.1 Quantitative data collection and analysis

To analyse the geographical composition of “no excuses” schools (RQ2) and to examine whether the DfE's rhetoric and reality match (RQ3), I collated a database of “no excuses” schools, including the 2019 DfE census data (DfE, 2019) and ONS indices of deprivation (MHCLG, 2019a; 2019b; 2019c). Following the selection process outlined in the next section, I selected 74 schools for this database. The following sections detail how I analysed this data.

3.3.1.a “No excuses” school eligibility

As explored in Chapter Two and this chapter, latent racial meaning and function exist behind overt policy discourse (Apple, 1999). Because this study investigates the latent racial meaning and function of “no excuses”, I will examine schools that overtly express their “no excuses” nature. I will combine aspects of the “no excuses” definitions outlined in Chapter One to identify these schools. To recall, Cheng *et al* (2017) used this definition for their meta-analysis:

No Excuses charter schools have conspicuously high academic expectations. No Excuses charter schools often embrace a college-going culture — that is, they intently socialise and instil the goal of attending college into their students, many of whom would be the first in their families to do so. No Excuses charter schools also feature strict behaviour codes, extended instructional time, and targeted instruction (e.g., tutoring) for low-performing students. (p. 210)

Golann and Torres (2018) focused on discipline in their definition — summarised below — which referred to the 4Cs:

1. Comprehensiveness: programs that pervade every behaviour for every member of the school community;
2. Clarity: the articulation of concrete, specific behavioural expectations;

3. Consistency — the strict following of school systems that makes no allowance for discretion;
4. Consequences — both positive and negative. (After Golann and Torres, 2018, pp. 4-5)

Both definitions are oriented towards US “no excuses” schools. However, when recontextualised, a policy becomes augmented by its hosts (Peck and Theodore, 2010). In the UK, schools must make reasonable adjustments to accommodate children with SEND (DfE, no date), as noted by the government’s behaviour tsar (Harris, 2023), Tom Bennett (2017):

To use an example previously quoted by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, if a school has a policy that if a pupil breaks the school rules on three occasions he or she will automatically be given a detention. [...] Some disabled students, such as those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autistic spectrum disorders or learning difficulties, are much more likely to break the school rules than other students. Rigid application of this policy would be likely to amount to indirect disability discrimination because, where a reasonable adjustment has not been made, a school will find it very difficult to justify the treatment as a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim. (p. 41)

Thus, schools are duty-bound by law to waive consistency for consequences in these circumstances, which should be reflected in their websites and policies. Therefore, while Golann and Torres' (2018) definition will serve as part of the inclusion criteria for schools, an adjustment to include an allowance of discretion for consequences would make it suitable for the UK context, as reflected in Table 3.2 (over).

Cheng *et al* (2017) caution that not every “no excuses” school will identify as “no excuses”. Indeed, schools may self-identify with the “no excuses” label as a marker of ‘extraordinary’ qualities (Braun, Maguire and Ball, 2010) without meeting these definitions — in a preliminary study in the taught phase of this EdD, I noted that a UK primary school followed this very pattern (Whittaker, 2018). Thus, to be eligible for inclusion, schools must both self-apply the term “*no excuses*” or a near-cognate such as “*zero tolerance*” but also have evidence of Cheng *et al*'s (2017) strict behaviour code *or* Golann and Torres' (2018) adjusted 4Cs (Table 3.3 and Table 3.2, respectively) on their website or behaviour policies. Thus, to be eligible for inclusion, schools must meet these codified criteria:

1. They must use the words “*no excuses*” (or a very near cognate such as “*zero-tolerance*” or some other statement that indicates an unacceptance of excuses for behaviour) somewhere on their website or policies (including at MAT level).
2. Upon inspection of their website (e.g. the ‘about us’ or ‘ethos and values’ pages) or behaviour policies (which English schools are required to publish (DfE, 2014b; 2016)), they must either meet the

definition set by Cheng *et al* (2017) or Golann and Torres (2018) including the allowance of discretion for consistency.

I will employ the coding frames in the tables below to review school eligibility for criterion two.

Table 3.2: Eligibility checklist code according to Golann and Torres' (2018) definition.

Database code	Golann and Torres' (2018) definitional component
Comp	Comprehensiveness — programs that pervade every behaviour for every member of the school community;
Clarity	Clarity — the articulation of concrete, specific behavioural expectations;
Consis	Consistency — the strict following of school systems that makes no allowance for discretion;
Conseq	Consequences — both positive and negative.
Conseq disc	Consequences with discretion

Table 3.3: Eligibility checklist code according to Cheng et al's (2017) definition.

Database code	Cheng et al's (2017) definitional component
Acad exp	conspicuously high academic expectations
Coll cult	embrace a college-going culture
Strict beh	strict behaviour code
Ext instr	extended instruction time
Targ instr	targeted instruction

3.3.1.b “No excuses” sample summary

I have summarised the sample schools in Appendix 1. This was compiled between May 2020 and April 2021. In total, 74 schools were eligible for inclusion.

I was unable to sample probabilistically. Probabilistic sampling requires a complete list of a population (Robson and McCartan, 2016, p. 278). Because there is no definitive list of English “no excuses” schools and because of the definitional and eligibility issues of eligibility described above, this was not an option for this study. As such, the sample was non-probabilistic, limiting the possibility of generalising and ascribing causation (Gorard, 2013).

Instead, I opted to sample purposively, a common approach for mixed method designs that allows for flexibility and identifying interesting and typical cases (Robson and McCartan, 2016, p. 281). The salience of high-profile organisations such as the Michaela Community School, the King Solomon Academy and the Ark schools offered a good starting point for interesting and typical cases. In the US, “no excuses” is closely woven into the charter school movement and their CSO’s rigid corporate identities and practices (Sondel, 2015a; Golann, 2021). In England, the Academies and Free Schools movements are equally likely to embody inflexible corporate identities (Barnes, 2020; Kulz, 2021). Thus, prominent “no excuses” MATs such as Ark and Future Academies, who overtly label their “no excuses” identity on their websites, present an efficient way to identify possible “no excuses” schools for the sample. This is recognised and incorporated into the eligibility criteria above with the coda ‘including at MAT

level'. Most of the sample are MAT schools, and only four are not — including Michaela Community School, a free school. Ark is a prominent “no excuses” MAT that is extremely large and constitutes 38 sample schools.

Where the DfE directly referenced a school, leader or teacher, I could identify schools eligible for further study. To ensure a wider sample, I also searched Google using terms such as ‘*no excuses school England*’ and ‘*zero tolerance school England*’, whose results indicated “no excuses” schools and MATs directly or media articles that analysed or quoted specific schools.

To check the eligibility of all potential cases, I reviewed their website against the eligibility criteria. The DfE stipulates that schools should publish their behaviour policies and ‘a statement of their ethos and values’ (DfE, 2014b; 2016), which offer a quick way to parse eligibility. To search expediently, I used these wildcard terms as a heuristic aid:

Consisten

Excuse

Behaviour

Expect

Discretion

Zero toleran

In addition, I combined these wildcards with Google's whole site/domain search functionality using the *site:* operator (Google, no date). For example, to search the whole of the Ark MAT website for "no excuses", I used the string:

site:https://arkonline.org "excuse"

If a wildcard search returned a positive result, I would explore the sites and domains in more detail and, if eligible, include the schools on the database as indicated in Appendix 1.

3.3.1.c Secondary quantitative data collection

To analyse whether the growth and establishment of "no excuses" is racist and specifically address RQ2's imperative to explore geographically racialised patterns, I gathered data that would describe a school's racial demographics and allow a geographical comparison of this data. The DfE's school census data afforded both these roles.

The DfE school census data is collected three times a year and comprises 'information like pupil's background details, special educational needs, free school meals eligibility, as well as educational history' (DfE, 2022). While pupil-level data is not freely available, pupil characteristics are compiled at the school level.

When I commenced compiling the eligible “no excuses” school list in Appendix 1, the most recent contemporaneous census data was the 2019 census, which I used for this analysis. This dataset presents school-level data as an Excel spreadsheet and includes national, regional and local authority-level data to compare. Four of the 74 eligible schools were inaugurated after the 2019 census data was collected, so they are not included in the analyses of census data.

To assess fully the reality and function of the “no excuses” poverty rhetoric (RQ3), I also drew on the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) Indices of Deprivation (IoD) data. This data can be used to compare ‘small areas across England and comparing larger administrative areas, e.g., local authorities’ (MHCLG, 2019a). The IoDs rank Lower Area Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in England — each ‘with an average population of 1,500’ — and arrange them into deciles where decile one represents the most deprived and decile ten the least. In addition, it provides data on the seven ‘domains of deprivation which combine to create the Index of Multiple Deprivation’:

Income (22.5%)

Employment (22.5%)

Education (13.5%)

Health (13.5%)

Crime (9.3%)

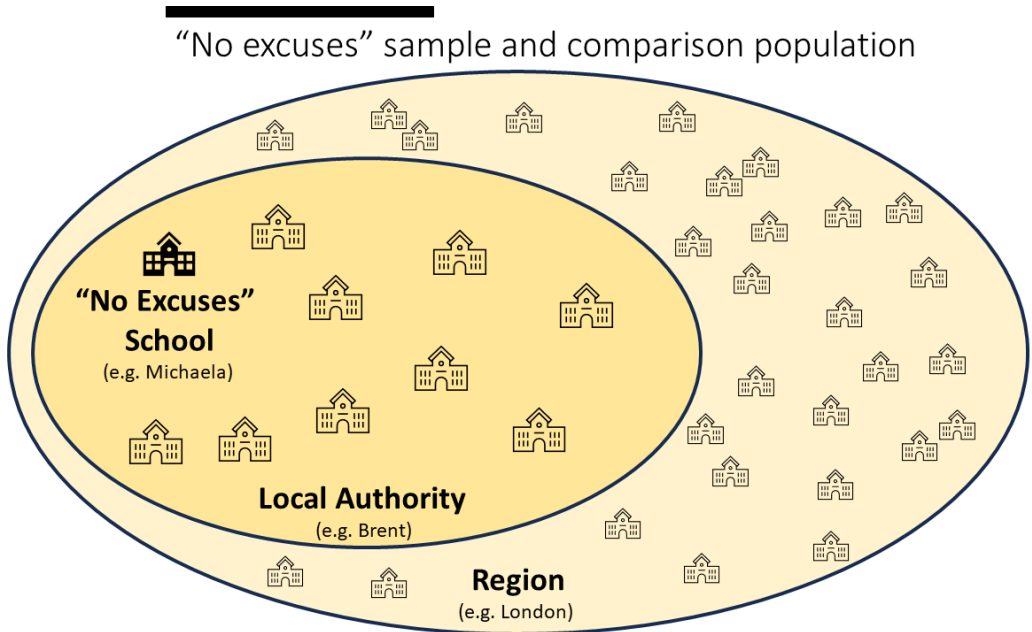
Barriers to Housing & Services (9.3%)

Every English postcode resides within an LSOA, and this data can be accessed through the MHCLG's (2019c) data extraction tool. Thus, I could explore the relative deprivation of each sample "no excuses" school.

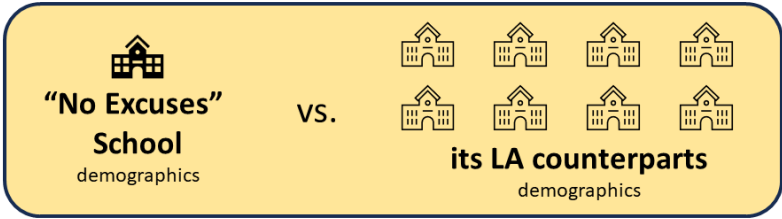
3.3.1.d Statistical analyses

To examine for differences between the sample schools' demographics and the demographics of their regions, I employed paired T-tests. T-tests analyse the extent of any significant statistical difference between two groups of data (Kim, 2015). In the census data I used, the schools' and its regional and LA data are related, the former being a constituent part of the latter. Thus, the paired T-test was most appropriate (Kim, 2015; Xu *et al*, 2015). In addition, a two-way test is most suitable because I could not be sure of any direction of influence between variables if there were a statistical difference. The relationships between the sample schools and their constituent populations are illustrated in Figure 3.2 (over), along with how each school is statistically compared to these populations' demographics in this study.

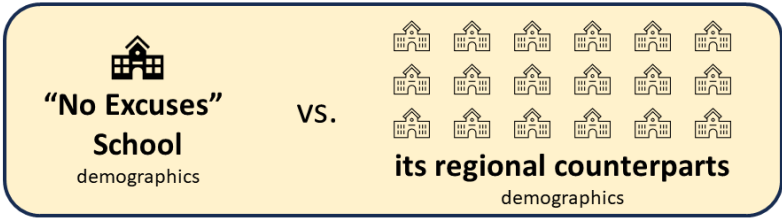
Figure 3.2: The statistical analyses employed in this study: the first diagram illustrates how the sample schools relate to their constituent Local Authority and regional populations; the second and third diagram illustrates how each school is statistically compared to these comparison populations' demographics.



Statistical comparison 1



Statistical comparison 2



I performed the paired two-way T-Tests on Excel using its T.TEST function (Microsoft, no date), expressed as:

=T.TEST([Array1],[Array2],2,1)

This was performed using school data and region and LA data for the racial categories described in the civil service's harmonised data standards (GSS, 2011; 2015) and represented in the DfE 2019 census data. To aid analysis comprehension, I also aggregated the data into these categories, which I applied the T-Test to in turn:

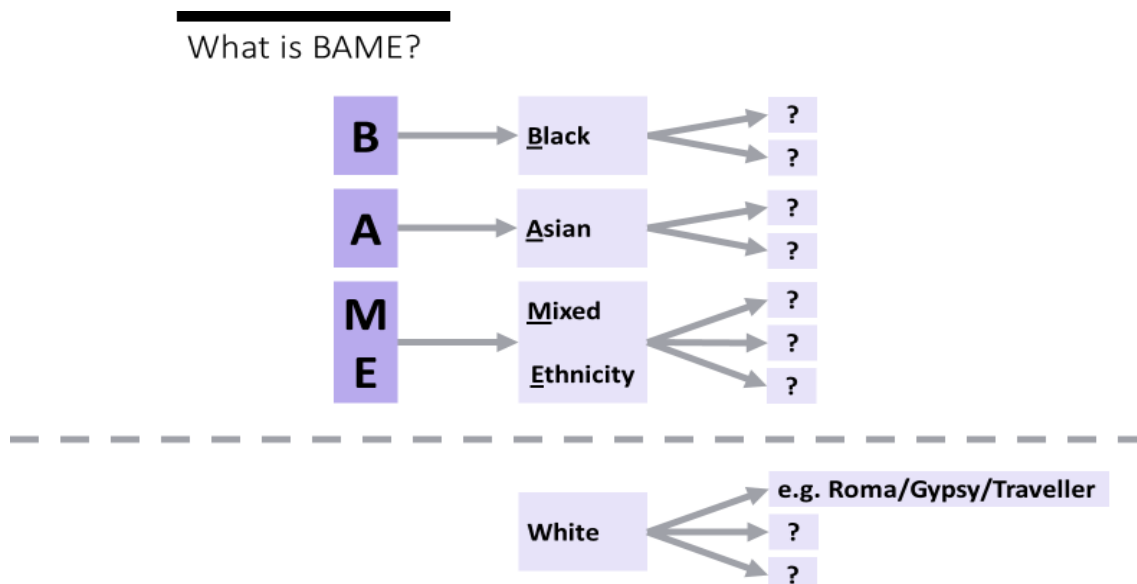
- BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic)
- Black
- Black, including mixed-race
- Asian
- Asian, including mixed-race
- White
- White, including mixed-race

Each T-Test analysis results in a p-value represented as a decimal, where 0.05 or lower is the standard threshold for statistical significance (Lakens, 2017; University of Southampton, no date).

3.3.1.e (Problematic) racial categories

In my analysis, I have used the contested term 'BAME'. However, I acknowledge that this is a controversial term, criticised by CRT theorists (Crawford, 2019) and the civil service (Bunglawala, 2019; Fakim and Macaulay, 2020; Khunti *et al*, 2020) for homogenising White people and non-White people into binary categories as summarised in Figure 3.3, below. One problem is that the term assumes that 'ethnic minorities' are defined 'solely by reference to the White majority', creating a *de facto* suppression of individuals' racial and cultural identity (Bunglawala, 2019). Another problem is the marginalisation of White groups such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are subsumed into the White category.

Figure 3.3: The categories subsumed into and obscured by the term BAME.



However, 'BAME' is used by many in the education policy arena, such as the Chartered College of Teachers (e.g. Sadiq, 2021; Tattersfield, 2021; Tereshchenko and Mills, 2021), in the teacher media generally (e.g. TES, 2021; Seith, 2021; Weale, 2020), by teaching unions (e.g. NASUWT, 2020a; 2020b; NEU, 2016) and the wider government and civil service (Aspinall, 2020). I have chosen this problematic categorisation because my study uses their data, and I wish to speak back to policymakers and their discourses on their terms.

Another issue is the lack of reference to 'race' in the DfE (2019) data. Instead, the civil service prefers 'ethnicity', 'ethnic group', and 'ethnic minorities' (Government Statistical Service, 2011; 2015). These categories are arbitrarily created and open to post hoc manipulation (Connelly, Gayle, and Lambert, 2016) and have been problematised from a QuantCrit perspective (Gillborn *et al*, 2021). Although I am using the 'BAME' category, I am also bound by the same categorical and methodological limitations of the census data I am analysing. I will examine the full range of racial categories expressed in the census data to overcome this limitation.

3.3.2 Qualitative data collection and analysis

Policymakers are pivotal in translocating and recontextualising education policy (Peck and Theodore, 2010). Their words offer insight into their *prima facie* and latent intentions. Thus, they can indicate whether the growth and establishment of "no excuses" schools in England are racist, as the overarching research question asks. Accordingly, I chose the DfE's website as this study's source of

qualitative data. Texts on the DfE website represent the official government policy messages and will have been created or delivered by key policy actors such as government ministers or senior civil servants. Thus, they represent the discourses and narratives the DfE wishes the world to see, unmediated by the interpretations of those outside the DfE in the media, for example. Thus, I searched for texts using the 'Search' function of the www.gov.uk website, filtering the 'Topic' to 'Education, training and skills'.

3.3.2.a Eligibility criteria

For the DE's texts to be worthwhile in this study, it must directly reference "*no excuses*" or its near-cognate precursor (Skiba and Peterson, 1999; Golann, 2015), "*zero tolerance*". Initial searches for these terms on the DfE website yielded texts referring to issues other than the "no excuses" model; this data is available in the long list in Appendix 2.

To avoid these false positives, I applied similar eligibility criteria to the quantitative data above, where each text would need to exhibit aspects of either Cheng *et al*'s (2017) or Golann and Torres' (2018) definition. In addition, to be congruous with the quantitative data, each text must be published on or before 27th June 2019, the date of the DfE census publication (2019). Thus, the eligibility criteria comprise:

1. The term "*no excuses*" must be located in the text at least once.

2. If it includes the term “*no excuses*”, it must address at least one aspect of the definition of Cheng *et al* (2017) or Golann and Torres (2018) outlined above.
3. The text must have been published on or before 27th June 2019.

3.3.2.b Sample summary

I searched the DfE website on 14th May 2020. The initial search yielded the texts detailed in Appendix 2. After analysing this long list against the eligibility criteria, 14 texts were eligible, as detailed in Table 3.4, over.

I have coded these texts with a number in the first column. When referring to these texts, I place this number in brackets — e.g. Gove [2] — enabling quick reference, especially regarding a text’s chronological position.

Table 3.4: The sample DfE texts from the gov.uk website.

Text code	Title	Author/speaker	Date	Text type	Notes: key indicative content/quotations
[1]	Michael Gove on bullying and bad classroom discipline in 'News of the World'	Michael Gove	7 September 2010	Authored Article	'Bullying' and 'disruptive' tied together with 'new powers'
[2]	Michael Gove to the National College Annual Conference, Birmingham	Michael Gove	25 November 2010	Speech	'a culture of no excuses, tough discipline'; 'poor pupil behaviour and we need a relentless focus on tackling this issue'
[3]	Schools Minister Nick Gibb responds to key stage 2 attainment statistics	Nick Gibb	9 December 2010	News Story	'we are giving such a priority to raising standards of behaviour in schools and supporting teachers and headteachers in their effort to instil a zero-tolerance approach to poor behaviour and low-level disruption in class'
[4]	Key stage 2 achievement statistics published	Nick Gibb	14 December 2010	News Story	'we are making the raising of standards of behaviour in schools a priority and why we are supporting teachers and headteachers to instil a zero-tolerance approach to poor behaviour in class'
[5]	New powers for teachers to improve discipline in schools	Michael Gove	4 April 2011	Press release	'All barriers to excellent behaviour are addressed through a no excuses culture and high level therapeutic support.'
[6]	High expectation, no excuses	Michael Wilshaw	9 February 2012	Press release	'Unless we have headteachers who take on the difficult challenges of schools performance and adopt a no excuses culture, we are never going to make the improvements we need'; focus on culture and overlexicalises "no excuses".
[7]	Michael Gove speech on academies	Michael Gove	11 January 2012	Speech	'no excuses model of education'; close link to the US model; King Solomon Academy case study; academisation links

Text code	Title	Author/speaker	Date	Text type	Notes: key indicative content/quotations
[8]	Education Secretary Michael Gove's speech to ASCL	Michael Gove	26 March 2012	Speech	'So we need to remove one of the biggest barriers to people staying in teaching - poor behaviour and discipline'; King Solomon Academy case study; academisation links
[9]	130,000 fewer pupils regularly missing school	Michael Gove	25 March 2014	Press release	'our determination to get tough on bad behaviour'; links attendance improvement to tough behaviour measures.
[10]	SCHOOLS NorthEast Summit 2015	Michael Wilshaw	15 October 2015	Speech	'Cultural appeaser'; 'behaviour management' before 'school discipline'
[11]	Nick Gibb: how autonomy raises standards	Nick Gibb	12 November 2015	Speech	King Solomon Academy case study; academisation link; draws heavily on US "no excuses"
[12]	Nick Gibb: the importance of school leadership	Nick Gibb	26 January 2016	Speech	King Solomon Academy case study; academisation link
[13]	Nicky Morgan: a world-class education system for every child	Nicky Morgan	24 February 2016	Speech	King Solomon Academy case study; academisation link
[14]	Nick Gibb: the role of leadership in school improvement	Nick Gibb	9 May 2016	Speech	King Solomon Academy case study; academisation link

3.3.2.c Qualitative data analysis

As outlined above and in Figure 3.1 and Table 3.1, I employed CRT, CDA, and CPA as theoretical tools to analyse the qualitative data. White supremacy, colour evasiveness, and the centrality of racism were the primary CRT tools, affording the means to identify both overt and tacit racial meaning within the DfE's texts.

I adopted Clarke and Braun's thematic analysis (2016) to explore these themes, a complementary approach to critical frameworks. After an initial read-through, I coded each text for the overt CRT themes within it. I refined my thematic coding to identify latent racial meaning in subsequent readings. For each coding iteration, I collated examples from the DfE's texts under thematic headings derived from the data itself but also CRT. Because of this study's underpinning concern with the centrality of racism and White supremacy (explored in more detail in section 3.2.2) and in light of Gillborn's (2005) warning to take into account 'tacit intentionality', I was cognizant that 'business-as-usual' racism (p. 492) would likely be obscured from view while also being ubiquitous as an 'absent presence' (Apple, 1999); thus, I assumed that if "no excuses" is racialised – tacitly or otherwise – it would likely be inapparent or even suppressed in the DfE's official discourses. As such, each coding iteration was attuned to these possibilities.

I adopted various CDA tools, particularly for identifying lexical chains and lexical absences (Fairclough, 2003; Taylor, 2004; Machin and Mayr, 2012; van Dijk,

2015). I also paid close attention to the absent presences and misrepresentation described in the CPA literature (Apple, 1999; Diem *et al*, 2014; Bradbury, 2020).

While I was initially drawn to NVivo to help analyse and code the texts, I opted to code manually. While NVivo is available to me and would afford me helpful experience for my professional development, its use is not congruent with the aims of CRT and QuantCrit: it objectifies qualitative data, and its automation would remove me somewhat from the analysis process.

However, I did adopt the approach of counting salient words and phrases within each text. While this ostensibly quantifies and objectifies qualitative data, I was conscious of the need to keep a pragmatic, interpretivist approach congruent with QuantCrit (Crawford *et al*, 2018; Gillborn, Warmington and Demack, 2018; DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz, 2018b). These word counts enabled a sense of scale for the discourses adopted within the texts.

When coding, I included all text, including titles, ledes, and notes, because they reinforce the discourses within the text itself. The title represents the most salient first impression. I did not analyse their web addresses, the additional links at the bottom, or the categories at the top of each page. An example of my coding is available in Appendix 3.

3.3.2.d Rigour

Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer four constructs that confer trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. While this chapter already inherently deals with the transferability and dependability constructs, it is worth directly exploring this study's claim to credibility and confirmability specifically.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility is the apparent fit between empirical experience and the researcher's representation. They recommend techniques such as triangulation and persistent observation. Thus, my analysis has triangulated between texts, explaining discursive patterns where they are present and giving multiple examples. Triangulation is also an inherent feature of this mixed-methods approach, where I triangulate between qualitative *and* quantitative data. To maintain rigour while analysing latent meanings and absences, I have triangulated between my inferences, referring to the literature to ground it in the context of other discourses and critical analyses.

We can confer confirmability with a clear relationship between data and interpretations (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). To enhance this study's claim to confirmability, I have used tables to demonstrate rigour in my interpretations of the data, an approach that Cloutier and Ravasi (2021, p. 113) suggest enhances 'transparency about data collection, analysis, and findings' and, ultimately, trustworthiness. While tables might be associated with problematic notions of

objectivity (Cloutier and Ravasi, 2021), when I use them, I set them into the context described by CRT above to enhance methodological congruence.

3.3.3 Ethics and positionality

Any study built on a *critical* theoretical framework has a distinctly normative character and requires a researcher to take a clear sociopolitical and ethical position (van Dijk, 1993). This study, built on CRT, requires me to start with the assumptions of CRT as described in the previous chapter and compels me to use my position to challenge systemic racism and White supremacy (Bergerson, 2003). I commenced this study desiring to explore the overt and latent racial meanings and intentions of the “no excuses” model and to offer critical counter-narratives.

As a White male researcher, my race will impact my research. However, until enrolling on this education doctorate (EdD), I had no personal or professional interest in race. Although I attended a grammar school, I was raised in a council house, and my working-class upbringing clashed with the school’s middle-class pomp. I have Tourette’s Syndrome and Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and at the grammar school, I constituted a SEND cohort of one. As a primary school teacher for 14 years in the West Midlands, I worked in the *urban* areas I describe in this study, drawing on and perpetuating the same deficit-laden, colour-evasive narratives. I initially saw the compulsory EdD social justice modules as a tick-box exercise, but they deeply challenged my conception of society and justice and my problematic complicity in oppression. I saw, for the

first time, my White privilege. From there, I found a willingness to work towards the cause of racial equality and equity.

Because I argue that the DfE constitute themselves as White saviours and because I critique their motives, I am aware of the ironic, clichéd pitfall of presenting myself as a White saviour. Therefore, while I feel it is my responsibility to problematise the racialisation of “no excuses”, I will also use it as a cautionary and personal memorandum.

I also acknowledge that my use of CRT could be considered part of a White appropriation or colonisation of the field (Bergerson, 2003). So, while I desire to problematise the growth and establishment of “no excuses” in England, I am mindful of my ethical responsibility not to talk on behalf of people of colour. Thus, I consider myself a White ally rather than a CRT scholar, as Bergerson (2003) recommends.

However, another aspect of this ethical responsibility is challenging dominant policy narratives (Apple, 1999; Gillborn, 2005). The data I will collect in this study is available for public scrutiny. BERA (2018) acknowledges that publicly available data, such as ‘policy documents, governing body minutes and charitable trust reports [...] are written with the expectation that they are available for public use or accountability’ (p. 10). Whereas we would require ethical permission for other data in the public domain, ‘[s]eeking consent would not normally be expected for data that have been produced expressly for public use’ (p. 10). This study’s DfE

data falls into this category and will not require ethical consent. I have received confirmation from the University of Birmingham's Research Ethics Panel that I do not need to pursue full ethical approval.

Chapter 4: Poverty, urban education and dog whistles: the racialised geographies of “no excuses” schools

4.1 Introduction

I have intentionally subverted the traditional format of separate, consecutive findings and discussion chapters by entwining both my quantitative and qualitative findings with critical narrative analysis, bringing my study in line with the theoretical and methodological commitments of Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Stovall, 2005a; Gillborn, 2006b) and more specifically QuantCrit (Gillborn, Warmington and Demack, 2018; Crawford *et al*, 2018; Crawford, 2019). This chapter is the first of two empirical chapters that address the study’s research questions:

- RQ1: What public discourses surround “no excuses” schools?
- RQ2: Is there a racial pattern to the geography of “no excuses” schools?
- RQ3: How does the “no excuses” policy function in rhetoric and reality?

CRT reminds us of the centrality of racism in society that is so ingrained that it is unremarkable. It also urges us to notice White supremacy — the way society is organised to privilege White interests (Rollock and Gillborn, 2011). As we

explored in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, these are the two overarching concepts that guide the analysis within these two chapters.

In this chapter, I first use QuantCrit to analyse “no excuses” demographic data quantitatively and argue that there is a demonstrable racialised patterning of the geographies of “no excuses” spaces (responding to RQ2). I then employ Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Critical Policy Analysis (CPA) to examine the overt discourses the Department for Education (DfE) use when talking about “no excuses” (RQ1). I find that despite being overtly race-evasive, the DfE’s rhetoric employs the heavily racialised coding of ‘urban’ discourses — an absent presence (Apple, 1999) — adding a further layer of geographical racialisation to “no excuses” (RQ2). I argue that constituting this racialised population through a poverty lens (RQ1) — which I evidence using a QuantCrit and CDA analysis — reifies both a policy problem and solution (RQ3). Finally, I make the case that the race-evasive ‘poverty’ and the racially coded ‘urban’ discourses function as a dog whistle that connects the White hegemonic alliance (Allen, 2009) with the geographic and economic expression of White interests through “no excuses” (RQ3).

To aid navigation and offer context, where I refer directly to eligible DfE “no excuses” sources (see Table 3.4), I will use the author’s surname followed by the text’s number [in square brackets]. Where I directly quote from the DfE content, any emphases are my own unless otherwise indicated (i.e. emphasis in original). Finally, because of restrictions on word count, I have offered only short excerpts of the DfE’s “no excuses” discourses in the main body text. However, a fuller

excerpt is provided in the footnote to aid understanding of its position and broader context.

4.2 The demographic makeup of “no excuses” schools

QuantCrit posits that racism is a central aspect of society and urges us to challenge numbers that may serve White interests (Gillborn, Warmington and Demack, 2018). On this basis, the first part of our analysis is interrogating numerical data to see if there is a racialising pattern to “no excuses” that the literature we explored in Chapter Two suggests we might find. As such, I assume that if “no excuses” does have a racialised expression, “no excuses” schools will be more likely to have a lower proportion of White British pupils and a higher proportion of pupils from BAME backgrounds.

To test this assumption, I collated the 2019 DfE school census data into a database of 74 “no excuses” schools that met the criteria from Chapter Three and grouped them according to their percentage population of White British pupils and BAME pupils. Of those 74 eligible schools, I included 70 in this analysis. The remaining four were not included in the 2019 census as they were inaugurated after the census date and, therefore, did not have complete, accurate and congruous data from the school census. In Chapter Three (section 3.3.1.e), I explored why the contested term, BAME, is appropriate in these circumstances.

In Table 4.1 below, I group the sample schools by the percentage of their White British population. The second column provides the frequency of sample “no excuses” schools as categorised by their percentage population of White British pupils. The third column represents this frequency as a percentage of the sample population (70 schools).

Table 4.1: Number of “no excuses” schools grouped by the percentage of their White British population.¹

% White British population category	Frequency of “no excuses” schools	% proportion of sample “no excuses” schools in this category
0-20%	35	50.00%
20-40% (>20% to ≤40%)	9	12.86%
40-60% (>40% to ≤60%)	6	8.57%
60-80% (>60% to ≤80%)	11	15.71%
80-100% (>80% to ≤100%)	9	12.86%
Sum	70	100%

The salient finding here is that 50% of all sample “no excuses” schools have a population of 0-20% White British pupils; therefore, half of all sample “no excuses” schools have very few White British students. Inverting the expression of this finding makes it even more arresting: the data implies that 50% of all “no excuses” schools have a population of children where between 80% and 100%

¹ Source: Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2019 (Underlying data: Schools, pupils and their characteristics 2019; Schools_Pupils_and_their_Characteristics_2019_pupil_characteristics_UD.csv)

are not White British. This compares starkly to the 12.86% — roughly an eighth — of the sample “no excuses” schools with a high proportion (between 80% and 100%) of White British pupils. At first glance, this compares starkly with the 65.5% White British primary pupils and the 67% in secondary schools reported in the DfE census data (DfE 2019). In this reading, the findings in Table 4.1 indicate that the DfE’s colour-evasive “no excuses” rhetoric is suppressing the apparent heavily racialised character of “no excuses” schools. Table 4.2 supports this finding:

Table 4.2: Number of “no excuses” schools grouped by the percentage of their BAME population.²

% BAME population category	Frequency of “no excuses” schools	% proportion of sample “no excuses” schools in this category
0-20%	14	20.00%
20-40% (>20% to ≤40%)	12	17.14%
40-60% (>40% to ≤60%)	8	11.43%
60-80% (>60% to ≤80%)	16	22.86%
80-100% (>80% to ≤100%)	20	28.57%
Sum	70	20.00%

As seen in Table 4.2, rather than representing the Whiteness of the schools’ populations, it aggregates the pupil populations constituted by the BAME

² Source: Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2019 (Underlying data: Schools, pupils and their characteristics 2019; Schools_Pupils_and_their_Characteristics_2019_pupil_characteristics_UD.csv)

definition in Chapter Three.³ In this analysis, 28.6% of the “no excuses” sample schools have a population of between 80% and 100% pupils from BAME backgrounds; to frame this another way, just over a quarter of the entire sample has a very high BAME population. In addition, just over half of the sample “no excuses” schools (51.5%) have a population of BAME pupils between 60% and 100%. In other words — and just as CRT and QuantCrit suggest — the sample “no excuses” schools appear to have a racialised pattern.

4.2.1 Comparing ethnic demographics of “no excuses” schools, their LAs and their regions

In the previous section, I illustrated the strong racial character of the sample “no excuses” schools. However, I did not compare these schools to any other normative reference. In this section, I *do* compare these schools' racial demographics: I assume that if “no excuses” schools follow a racialised pattern, the sample “no excuses” schools will have ethnic demographics that differ from their constituent LAs and regions. Examining this relationship will help determine whether the English “no excuses” policy has a spatially expressed racial character (Vélez and Solórzano, 2018).

To test this assumption, I compared the ethnicity composition of the sample “no excuses” schools to the ethnicity composition of the schools' LAs and regions using a two-way paired Student's T-Test (calculated using Excel's 'T.TEST'

³ See the note in Chapter 3 (section 3.3.1.e) on the controversy and complexities surrounding the BAME terminology.

function). This tests the difference between two data sets and provides a value — a ‘p-value’ — indicating the statistical confidence that there is a difference; a lower p-value means more confidence for covariance. Traditionally, a p-value of 0.05 or lower ($p \leq 0.05$) is the standard threshold for statistical significance (Lakens, 2017; University of Southampton, no date), which I indicate with a single asterisk (*). A p-value of 0.01 or lower ($p \leq 0.01$) — an even more robust indicator of significance — is marked with two asterisks (**). Any p-value below the extremely low threshold of 0.001 ($p \leq 0.001$) — more robust still — is marked with three asterisks (***). Therefore, where there is an asterisk, there is a statistically significant difference between the data. I present the data this way to make the findings more readily accessible for a non-specialist reader.

While p-values are routinely used as a statistical proxy for rigour and significance (Lakens, 2017; University of Southampton, no date), they are also problematic. In section 3.3.2.c, we explored the QuantCrit tenet that data cannot speak for itself (Crawford *et al*, 2018) and that there is no single correct interpretation of any quantitative data; as a simultaneously ubiquitous and arbitrary signifier, p-values could be wielded as a tool to allow data to speak for itself and offer “no excuses” research a veneer of objectivity. I have chosen to use p-values in this study to speak back to DfE and majoritarian narratives on their own terms and ‘use numbers for social justice’ (Crawford *et al*, 2018), another QuantCrit tenet.

As before, I drew on the 2019 ONS census data for the 70 schools with available data. Table 4.3 compares BAME populations; Table 4.4 compares aggregate populations for ‘Black’, ‘Black including mixed race’, ‘Asian’, ‘Asian including mixed race’, ‘White and White including mixed race’ ethnicity categories; Table 4.5 compares all ethnicity categories as available on the school census (GSS, 2011). These will each be discussed in turn below.

First, Table 4.3 (over) outlines the comparison between the proportional population of pupils from a BAME background within the 70 sample “no excuses” schools (the ‘school level’ column) relative to the schools’ respective LAs (the ‘LA level’ column) and region (the ‘region level’ column). It also indicates the standard deviation (SD) of the average percentage population of pupils from BAME backgrounds at school, LAs and region levels. The final two columns represent p-values of the two-way Student’s T-Test between the average of the sample “no excuses” schools’ percentage population of pupils from BAME backgrounds and their respective LAs (the ‘T-Test School vs LA’ column) and regions (the ‘T-Test School vs Region’ column):

Table 4.3: Comparison of average aggregated BAME population percentages in “no excuses” schools and their LAs and regions.⁴

	School level	LA level	Region level	T-Test School vs LA	T-Test School vs Region

⁴ Source: Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2019 (Underlying data: Schools, pupils and their characteristics 2019; Schools_Pupils_and_their_Characteristics_2019_pupil_characteristics_UD.csv)

Group	Ave % of population	SD	Ave % of population	SD	Ave % of population	SD	p-value	p-value
BAME %	55.73%	31.05	41.52%	20.8	35.73%	15.28	0.000***	0.000***

***p≤.001, **p≤.01, *p≤.05

As seen in Table 4.3, the extremely low p-values ($p \leq .001$ threshold for statistical significance) are unambiguous: they indicate a very robust statistical difference between the percentage populations of children from BAME backgrounds in the sample “no excuses” schools compared to their constituent LAs and regions. This analysis suggests that “no excuses” schools *have* geographically racialised populations.

This racialised patterning continues in Table 4.4 (below), where I have aggregated the census data into its most granular ethnicity categories. All the p-values of the two-way T-Test analyses are considerably lower than the 0.05 threshold (*), most are lower than the 0.01 threshold (**), and many are lower than the 0.001 threshold (***), indicating the most robust statistical significance:

Table 4.4: Comparison of average aggregated ethnic group population percentages in “no excuses” schools and their LAs and regions.⁵

Group	School level	LA level	Region level	T-Test School vs LA	T-Test School vs Region
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⁵ Source: Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2019 (Underlying data: Schools, pupils and their characteristics 2019; Schools_Pupils_and_their_Characteristics_2019_pupil_characteristics_UD.csv)

	Ave % of population	SD	Ave % of population	SD	Ave % of population	SD	p-value	p-value
Black	16.24%	16.47	11.51%	10.17	9.71%	6.83	0.000***	0.000***
Black inc. mixed race	19.57%	18.02	14.41%	11.25	12.53%	7.58	0.000***	0.000***
Asian	24.05%	27.23	17.87%	14.75	15.71%	4.9	0.004**	0.014*
Asian inc. mixed race	25.50%	27.36	19.42%	15	17.24%	5.04	0.005**	0.016*
White	41.34%	31.28	46.59%	22.46	55.21%	17.73	0.023*	0.000***
White inc. mixed race	44.67%	31.16	49.50%	21.76	58.03%	16.97	0.044*	0.000***

***p≤.001, **p≤.01, *p≤.05

Thus, as seen in Table 4.4, we can say there is a statistically significant difference between the average populations of “no excuses” schools and their respective LAs and regions; the sample “no excuses” schools have higher proportions of children from ‘Black’ (***p≤.001, ***p≤.001 respectively), ‘Black including Mixed Race’ (***p≤.001, ***p≤.001), ‘Asian’ (**p≤.01, *p≤.05), and ‘Asian including Mixed Race’ backgrounds (**p≤.005, *p≤.05) than their regional and local counterparts.

The analysis also reveals the complementary finding that the sample “no excuses” schools have a statistically significantly *lower* proportion of children who are ‘White’, and ‘White including Mixed Race’ than their regional and LA counterparts. Again, this analysis strongly suggests that “no excuses” schools have geographically racialised populations, as both CRT and QuantCrit suggest we might see.

The final analyses in Table 4.5 (p. 134, over) represent the school census data in their most granular, disaggregated form with an analysis frame similar to the previous two tables. While this analysis does not find a statistically significant difference between the population of “no excuses” schools and their constituent LAs for ‘Traveller’, ‘White Other’, ‘Gypsy/Roma’, ‘White and Black Caribbean’, ‘White and Asian’, ‘Indian’, ‘Other Asian’, ‘Other Black’, and ‘Chinese’ categories, others have a statistically significant difference:

- there is a *statistically significant difference* (* $p \leq .05$) for ‘White British’ and ‘White and Black African’ categories;
- there is a *stronger statistically significant difference* (** $p \leq .01$) for ‘Pakistani’, ‘Bangladeshi’, ‘Black African’, and ‘Other Ethnic’ categories;
- there is a stronger statistical difference *still* (** $p \leq .001$) for ‘Irish’, ‘Black Caribbean’, and ‘Unclassified’ categories.

In summary, the sample “no excuses” schools have a higher percentage population of every ethnicity category than their constituent LAs, except ‘White British’ and ‘Irish’, where the sample “no excuses” schools have lower proportional populations. If we compare sample “no excuses” schools to their respective regions, these statistical differences are amplified. There are statistically significant differences (* $p \leq .05$) between ‘White and Black African’, ‘Other mixed’, and ‘Traveller’ categories, stronger differences (** $p \leq .01$) for the ‘Pakistani’ category and stronger still (** $p \leq .001$) for ‘White British’, ‘Irish’, ‘Black Caribbean’, ‘Black African’, ‘Other Ethnic’, and ‘Unclassified’ categories.

This analysis demonstrates that sample “no excuses” schools have higher percentage populations in every ethnic category than their respective regions, except ‘White British’, ‘Irish’, and ‘Traveller’, where the relationship is negative; it adds more weight to the previous sections’ summaries that “no excuses” schools have geographically racialised populations. From these statistical analyses alone, we can securely reply to RQ2 to say this is a ***strongly racialised geographical pattern to England’s “no excuses” schools.***

Table 4.5: Comparison of average ethnic group population percentages in “no excuses” schools and their LAs and regions.⁶

Group	School level		LA level		Region level		T-Test School vs LA	T-Test School vs Region
	Ave % of population	SD	Ave % of population	SD	Ave % of population	SD	p-value	p-value
White British	33.50%	31.56	37.98%	25.06	46.26%	21.51	0.042*	0.000***
Irish	0.14%	0.21	0.37%	0.25	0.34%	0.14	0.000***	0.000***
Traveller	0.04%	0.14	0.06%	0.04	0.07%	0.01	0.244	0.045*
White Other	7.38%	5.53	7.86%	4.57	8.24%	3.97	0.315	0.127
Gypsy/ Roma	0.28%	0.66	0.32%	0.37	0.31%	0.19	0.565	0.642
White and Black Caribbean	2.17%	1.83	1.96%	0.98	1.89%	0.56	0.278	0.18
White and Black African	1.17%	0.95	0.95%	0.46	0.93%	0.36	0.018*	0.011*
White and Asian	1.45%	1.21	1.55%	0.39	1.53%	0.19	0.461	0.579
Other Mixed	3.63%	3.3	3.03%	1.43	2.85%	1.25	0.06	0.020*
Indian	3.39%	5.88	3.74%	4.34	4.11%	1.77	0.346	0.315

⁶ Source: Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2019 (Underlying data: Schools, pupils and their characteristics 2019; Schools_Pupils_and_their_Characteristics_2019_pupil_characteristics_UD.csv)

Pakistani	13.48%	24.45	8.66%	11.62	5.42%	2.47	0.008**	0.005**
Bangladeshi	4.20%	7.07	2.60%	3.27	3.01%	2.04	0.007**	0.161
Other Asian	2.49%	2.23	2.40%	1.88	2.67%	1.45	0.689	0.466
Black Caribbean	3.98%	5.15	2.62%	2.8	2.10%	1.62	0.001***	0.000***
Black African	10.97%	11.65	7.64%	6.62	6.45%	4.47	0.001**	0.000***
Other Black	1.29%	1.63	1.24%	1.19	1.15%	0.74	0.734	0.386
Chinese	0.48%	0.6	0.46%	0.29	0.51%	0.18	0.744	0.76
Other Ethnic	7.02%	8.47	4.66%	4.57	3.10%	1.94	0.002**	0.000***
Unclassified	2.93%	2.39	1.72%	0.82	1.41%	0.34	0.000***	0.000***

***p≤.001, **p≤.01, *p≤.05

4.3 Geographies of race as an absent presence

While the data above demonstrates a strongly racialised geographical pattern to England’s “no excuses” schools, we must heed QuantCrit’s warning that data cannot speak for itself; indeed, as Gillborn, Warmington and Demack (2018) caution, ‘voice and insight are vital’ (p. 158).

With this in mind, in this section, I explore the discursive racial coding of the DfE’s “no excuses” content, which comprises fourteen texts whose eligibility criteria are outlined in Chapter Three and whose complete list is available in Appendix 3. To do so, I pay close attention to the DfE’s near-ubiquitous ‘urban’ discourses, which — in tandem with the QuantCrit analysis above — I argue constitute “no excuses” as a spatially racialising policy. In doing so, I offer a partial response to RQ1 and RQ2. Finally, I speculate on the functions of the “no excuses” racial geographies

in response to RQ3 and argue that the DfE’s ‘urban’ discourses represent a dog whistle that engages Allen’s (2009) White hegemonic alliance.

4.3.1 “No excuses” and talking about race without mentioning race

We know from Chapter Two that “no excuses” schools and harsh disciplinary practices — indeed any disciplinary practices — have disproportionately racialised impacts. We also know from this chapter that “no excuses” has a quantifiably geographical expression in England. However, there is a distinct absence of race in the DfE’s eligible content: the DfE policy actors refer to race in only four of the eligible texts, and even then, they are isolated and linked to ethnic groups (e.g. Somali and Turkish) rather than race in-and-of-itself with the exception to one Black/White binary reference, as illustrated in Table 4.6 (below). When the cornerstone texts ‘Sweating the Small Stuff’ (Whitman, 2008) and ‘No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning’ (Thernstrom and Thernstrom, 2004) express with pride how they use “no excuses” to respond to the racial attainment gap specifically, why is the DfE not talking about race explicitly to appear virtuous for addressing England’s racial attainment gap (Gillborn, 2005; 2010a; 2018)? Why would it be advantageous for the DfE to suppress racial discourses while foregrounding poverty discourses when promoting “no excuses”?

Table 4.6: Examples of ‘race’ in “no excuses” DfE texts.

Gove [7] ⁷	Let’s be clear what these people mean. Let’s hold their prejudices up to the light. What are they saying? If you’re poor, if you’re Turkish, if you’re Somali, then we don’t expect you to
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⁷ ‘Michael Gove speech on academies’ (Speech, 11 January 2012)

	succeed. You will always be second class and it's no surprise your schools are second class. I utterly reject that attitude.
Gove [2] ⁸	In New York, Charter schools - like the inspirational Knowledge is Power Programme schools - have dramatically narrowed the vast performance gap between black and white children and 91 per cent of those benefiting are on free or reduced price meals.
Gove [8] ⁹	Or Yasmin Bevan in Denbigh High in Luton – whose students again come from some of the most challenging areas of one of our most ethnically diverse cities and who again excel - securing superb results in the GCSEs which set them on course for the best universities. And I cannot miss out Barry Day - in Nottingham - who again draws his students from the most challenging neighbourhoods in an ethnically diverse city - and who generates outstanding academic results in an environment where grace, civility and cultural ambition are expected of every child.
Wilshaw [10] ¹⁰	As a leader, are you standing firm against the insidious anti-learning, low aspiration culture that often pervades non-immigrant communities in this country? As a teacher and headteacher, I well remember the politics of despair and fatalism – London was just too complex, London was just too diverse , London was just too poor for anything to be done.

Apple (1999) argues that race gets much of its power through its hiddenness (p. 11). When race is invisible, it is unavailable to scrutiny. In the DfE's "no excuses" discourses, the absence of race serves this function. Even if not intentional, the DfE's apparent White ignorance (Bain, 2018) epistemologically supports White supremacy through misrepresentation.

However, because the DfE name-check opponents such as Dobbie (Dobbie and Fryer, 2011), we might reasonably assume they are abreast of "no excuses" research, including that which portrays its problematic racialised impacts. Indeed, recent subject access requests have indicated that the DfE keep files on researchers that criticise state policy (Fazackerley, 2023), one of whom being Ian

⁸ 'Michael Gove to the National College Annual Conference, Birmingham' (Speech, 25 November 2010)

⁹ 'Michael Gove to the National College Annual Conference, Birmingham' (Speech, 25 November 2010)

¹⁰ 'High expectation, no excuses' (Press release, 9 February 2012)

Cushing, who has exposed the racio-linguistic racism in “no excuses” (Cushing, 2021; 2022; 2023a; 2023b). Michael Gove — the Secretary of State for Education from 2010 to 2014 and author of half the eligible “no excuses” content — is considered intelligent, obsessive over details and knowledgeable on an extensive range of topics (Taylor, 2007; Taylor, 2010; Leslie, 2015; John, 2016). So rather than assuming ignorance, we might reasonably consider that Gove and the DfE knew about — but crucially intentionally ignored — the “no excuses” racial critiques; thus, we might also consider that they purposely evade colour as a means to continue a racially damaging policy and suppress their role in doing so. Indeed, their occasional leakiness of race references, illustrated in Table 4.6, highlights that they *are* conscious of race.

The DfE’s colour-evasiveness affords them an ‘impregnable yet elastic ideological wall that enables Whites to ‘state racial views without appearing to be irrational or rabidly racist’ (Bonilla-Silva, 2014, p. 305). Because talking about race is assumed by some to be racist in-and-of-itself (Gillborn, 2019a), their avoidance of racialised discourses affords them a sense of moral superiority for not seeing race at all, commonly expressed by many in society (Annamma, Jackson, and Morrison, 2017). However, Gillborn’s (2005) concept of ‘tacit intentionality’ shatters this illusion. The DfE’s choice to ignore race and racial outcomes constitutes intentionality; to fail to measure — or worse, to choose not to measure — the racialised impact of a policy renders *de facto* support for those racialised outcomes and, therefore, White Supremacy.

Recently, however, the tide of harsh discipline and “no excuses” has begun to turn. While “no excuses” has long been criticised for its disproportionate racial impact on, for example, student wellbeing (Golann, 2015; 2021) and exclusion rates (Skiba, Arredondo and Williams, 2014; Skiba Fergus and Gregory, 2023), in light of the George Floyd murder and Black Lives Matter movement, “no excuses” CMOs and MATs have started to distance themselves from harsh discipline both sides of the Atlantic (Millar, 2019; 2020) and even KIPP has relaxed its discipline (Lough, 2020). While the DfE content predates this distancing, they illustrate why maintaining racial silence is advantageous for the DfE, especially where a policy might be disproportionately racialised.

A final advantage is that the DfE can engage potential White allies through race-evasiveness. Leonardo (2002, p. 41) argues that ‘to remain dominant’, Whiteness has to seduce allies and ‘convince them of the advantages of such an alliance’. The content is replete with examples of the DfE courting leaders and private sector engagement, which we explore in more detail in Chapter Five (section 5.5.3)¹¹. For example, Nicky Morgan¹² [13] states: “I am asking you to come forward and play a role in the renewal of England’s education system”. In Chapter Two, we saw how narratives — and even statistics — are manipulated to speak directly to the non-poor Whites of Allen’s (2009) White hegemonic alliance (Gillborn, 2010b; Crawford, 2019). This alliance introduces another group the DfE might also court: poor Whites. Poor Whites and non-poor Whites, Allen argues, collude to maintain White dominance through a tacit, race-based agreement

¹¹ More examples are available in Appendix 5.

¹² ‘Nicky Morgan: a world-class education system for every child’ (Speech, 24 February 2016)

where poor Whites accept their place in the White hierarchy, knowing it protects them from the racial oppression exerted on those outside the alliance.

To communicate with their constituents, policymakers may employ ‘dog-whistling’ (a concept returned to in 4.3.3) — talking about race without talking about it directly (Jabbar *et al*, 2022, p. 492). This tactic has been noted in school-choice policies (Jabbar *et al*, 2002) and also in the White siege narratives of UK secondary school assessments (Gillborn, 2010a; Crawford, 2019). Could the colour-evasive poverty discourses function as dog whistles to non-poor Whites? To answer this, we need to examine the eligible “no excuses” texts and quantitative data for evidence of either the overt or absent presence of poverty discourse and other latent racial meaning, which would indicate they communicate about race without talking about it directly.

4.3.2 When ‘urban’ means ‘race’

In Chapter Two, we also established that ‘urban’ discourses are racially coded. According to critical scholars, ‘urban’ denotes race (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995) and, in particular, a geographically rooted racialised experience viewed with a deficit perspective (Kobayashi and Peake, 2000; Picower, 2009; Milner, 2012; Kulz, 2014; Williams *et al*, 2022). Government data (Defra, 2023) shows that urban areas are heavily racialised: while rural areas are 96.9% White, urban areas are 81.7% White and 18.3% ‘minority ethnic’. Mirza and Warwick (2022) also calculate that ‘most ethnic groups are disproportionately concentrated in cities, with 58% of the Black population of England and Wales residing in London

as of 2011” (p. 1). Thus, where the DfE refers to the ‘urban’, we too can assume this term is racially loaded and that the government — whose statistics confirm this — are aware of this racialisation. Indeed, the DfE frequently employs urban discourses: urban — or its near-synonym, inner-city — is directly referred to in six eligible texts.

Even before we explore the latent meanings in the DfE’s content in more detail, we can partially construct answers to RQ1 and RQ3: ***“no excuses” policy discourses function racially because of the DfE’s geographically patterned construction of the problem as ‘urban’.***

4.3.3 Decoupling and ‘dog-whistling’ with urban discourses

Despite the strong racialisation demonstrated in this study’s quantitative analysis, the DfE’s “no excuses” discourse is largely colour-evasive: race is only mentioned in four eligible texts, which we explore in more detail in section 4.4. However, in this section, we will explore how the heavy presence of ‘urban’ discourses functions as a strong signifier of race while preserving the plausible deniability of colour-evasion. Essentially, through ‘urban’ discourses, policymakers can talk about race without mentioning it; thus, they function as a dog whistle. Before speculating on the dog whistle’s potential recipients, we must first explore how these ‘urban’ discourses are framed and function.

Delaney (2002) argues that ‘race — in all of its complexity and ambiguity, as ideology and identity — is what it is and does what it does precisely because of

how it is given spatial expression' (p. 7). Racialised organisations use space as a technology of power to reproduce racial logics, legitimising unequal resource distribution and decoupling race and inequality (Ray, 2019; Stewart, García and Petersen, 2021; Yazdih, 2022). The DfE's policy actors do the latter in their urban discourses. For example, Nicky Morgan¹³ [13] decouples race and inequality by juxtaposing individual and institutional success against what she portrays as a deficit mentality 'synonymous with inner-city schools':

This is what Sir Clive Bourne brought to Hackney when he decided to sponsor one of the first city academies back in 2004. Clive, an Eastender who left school at 15 and built up a successful overnight parcels business, desperately wanted to bring educational opportunity to the area in which he grew up. As a magistrate in Newham, he often saw the dire consequences of there being so little... This combination of moral purpose and business acumen led to the creation of a school which would combat the low expectations, poor behaviour and dumbing down that had so long been synonymous with inner-city schools.

Morgan (2016 [13])

Although the 'inner city' reference subtly indicates she is talking about race, she avoids the explicit connection. Through connecting the 'inner-city' with 'low expectations' and 'poor behaviour' and through her overtly colour-evasive

¹³ 'Nicky Morgan: a world-class education system for every child' (Speech, 24 February 2016)

rhetoric, Morgan couples inequality with personal agency and responsibility while simultaneously decoupling inequality and race. Elsewhere, Gibb¹⁴ [11] decouples race and inequality by arguing that because — in his eyes — ‘urban’ children lack “*discipline and comportment*”, they need “no excuses” to achieve in school and not because of any racial inequality. Perhaps the most egregious example, however, is Gove’s¹⁵ [2] almost absurdly hyperbolic characterisation of “no excuses”:

With a relentless focus on traditional subjects, a culture of no excuses, tough discipline, personalised pastoral care and enthusiastic staff who work free from Government bureaucracy to help every child succeed, these schools are amazing engines of social mobility that are now sending children from ghetto areas to elite universities.

(Gove, 2010b [2])

The word ‘ghetto’ is unmistakably racialised (Blaut, 1974). Thus, Gove (above) deliberately uses geography to decouple race from inequality through cultural overdetermination (Ladson-Billings, 2006a). While these urban discourses signify an absence of explicit racial reference and thus a desire to decouple race and inequality, the unmistakable racial coding of the ‘ghetto’, ‘inner-city’ and ‘urban’

¹⁴ ‘Their conclusion was clear - I quote: “We show that urban and lottery-sample charter effectiveness can be explained by adherence to a No Excuses approach to **urban education that emphasises discipline and comportment**, traditional reading and math skills, instruction time, and selective teacher hiring.”’ (Gibb, 2015 [11], ‘Nick Gibb: how autonomy raises standards’ (Speech, 12 November 2015) - quoting findings from Angrist *et al*, 2013, p. 2).

¹⁵ ‘Michael Gove to the National College Annual Conference, Birmingham’ (Speech, 25 November 2010)

allows the discourses to function as a dog whistle. Gove's juxtaposition of 'ghetto areas' and 'elite universities' as antitheses sharpens the racialisation further.

Indeed, antithetical pairs play a vital role in the DfE's race-evasive, geographical dog whistles. As seen in the previous section, the DfE regularly employ this rhetorical device for urban discourses: Table 4.7 (over) illustrates how the DfE pairs antithetical geographical categories such as 'suburbs' and 'rural' in their "no excuses" content. This pattern is also noted by Kulz (2014) in the DfE's juxtaposition of 'urban' and 'leafy' in "no excuses" discourses (pp. 698-690).

Table 4.7: The references and allusions to the urban and urban antitheses in the DfE's "no excuses" content are arranged into pairs according to proximity within each text; the underlined words are modifiers.

Text code	Author/Title/(Type, date)	Urban reference/allusion*	Urban antitheses*
[2]	Michael Gove: 'Michael Gove to the National College Annual Conference, Birmingham' (Speech, 25 November 2010)	ghetto areas	<u>elite</u> universities
[5]	Michael Gove: 'New powers for teachers to improve discipline in schools' (Press release, 4 April 2011)	<u>tough</u> inner city primary and comprehensive schools London <u>tough</u> inner city primary and comprehensive schools West London	n/a
[7]	Michael Gove: 'Michael Gove speech on academies' (Speech, 11 January 2012)	large urban primaries inner cities	<u>small</u> rural primaries <u>leafy</u> suburbs
		Haringey Hackney Downs Harlem's Children's Zone ARK schools like Burlington Danes or King Solomon or Walworth Academy. In Mossbourne Academy and Manchester Academy (all in urban areas)	leafiest suburbs
[10]	Michael Wilshaw: 'SCHOOLS NorthEast Summit 2015' (Speech, 15 October 2015)	Newcastle London Bermondsey Hackney	rural poor coastal town
[12]	Nick Gibb: 'Nick Gibb: the importance of school leadership' (Speech, 26 January 2016)	<u>most disadvantaged</u> London wards for child poverty	middle-class suburb <u>pleasant</u> rural town
[13]	Nicky Morgan: 'Nicky Morgan: a world-class education system for every child' (Speech, 24 February 2016)	most disadvantaged London wards for child poverty inner-city schools London	middle class suburb pleasant rural town n/a

*Direct quotations: the quotations are arranged into antithetical pairs according to proximity within each text.

These antithetical pairs activate cognitive frames (Lakoff, 2014) and sharpen concepts in recipients' minds (Cuddon, 2012). These geographical terms are often accompanied by a modifier, with 'suburb' and 'town' modified by 'leafy', 'middle-class' and 'pleasant', and urban references modified by the pejoratives 'tough' and 'disadvantaged', as demonstrated in Table 4.7. These further sharpen the antithetical distinctions and further decouple the relationship between race and inequality.

To return to the research questions, we now have quantitative and discursive evidence of the geographical racialisation of "no excuses" (RQ2), and I have argued that the 'urban' discourses function to decouple race and inequality and act as a dog whistle (RQ3). In the next section, we turn to who the recipients of this dog whistle might be.

4.4 "No excuses" and racialised poverty

RQ1 asks, 'What public discourses surround "no excuses" schools?' In this section, I will demonstrate how the DfE overtly constitutes poverty as a policy problem and "no excuses" as a solution, but that this framing still has a racialising character despite being apparently colour-evasive. To do so, I employ QuantCrit and Critical Discourse Analysis tools to challenge the DfE's poverty rhetoric. Then, I argue that this further naturalises and ingrains the systemic, racialised inequality underpinning these discourses. I then address RQ3 'How does the "no excuses" policy function in rhetoric and reality?' by drawing on Critical Race

Theory concepts of White supremacy and colour-evasiveness to argue that the DfE's poverty discourses engage Allen's (2009) White hegemonic alliance.

4.4.1 “No excuses” and poverty rhetoric

The DfE overtly and tacitly connects “no excuses” to poverty, referring to *poverty* (or near cognate terms) in eleven of the fourteen eligible DfE texts and *wealth* (as a counterpoint) in five. Indeed, the DfE explicitly linked “no excuses” and poverty from as early as 2010 when Gove [2]¹⁶ valorised the US charter school programme and the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) and its aim “to drive up attainment, especially among the poorest”. This link is also apparent in the government's wide use of the term ‘free school meals’ (FSM), a term synonymous with poverty in UK education literature (Strand, 2014; Ilie, Sutherland and Vignoles, 2017; Taylor, 2018; Jerrim, 2020; 2021); directly referencing FSM in ten of the eligible texts.

The DfE's “no excuses” poverty discourse is perhaps unsurprising given other “no excuses” proponents cite *poverty* as a core purpose as in the literature review (see Kirby, 2016; Whitman, 2008; Thernstrom and Thernstrom, 2004). As seen in the introductory section to this thesis, poverty is also a very racially loaded phenomenon in the UK, where ‘Black and minority ethnic people are 2.5 times

¹⁶ ‘Michael Gove to the National College Annual Conference, Birmingham’ (Speech, 25 November 2010): ‘In America, President Obama is pressing ahead with radical school reform to **close the gap between rich and poor**... He has insisted - along with other Democrat reformers like Arne Duncan, Joel Klein and Michelle Rhee - that there be more great Charter schools - the equivalent of our Academies - to drive up attainment, **especially among the poorest**. In New York, Charter schools - like the inspirational Knowledge is Power Programme schools - have dramatically narrowed the vast performance gap between black and white children and 91 per cent of those benefiting are on **free or reduced price meals**... We know, from Leon Feinstein's work, that low ability children from **rich families** overtake high ability children from **poor families** during primary school.’

more likely to be in poverty than white people' (Edminstron, Begum and Kataria, 2022, p. 2). Thus, poverty is an undeniably racial issue, and the connection between them is growing. Arguably, then, the DfE's references to poverty are, therefore, tacitly racialised.

Critical scholars would also note that discourses of poverty in education are not only racialised but deficit-laden (Ladson-Billings, 2006a; 2017; Milner, 2013; Aggarwal, 2016). As the literature review outlines, teachers and leaders routinely draw on deficit discourses to pathologise students' cultures (Ladson-Billings, 2006a; 2017; Golann, 2015; Picower and Mayorga, 2015; Ullucci and Howard, 2015). This overdetermining of the culture of poverty (Ladson-Billings, 2006a) is said to serve White supremacy through the racial epistemology of White ignorance, which foregrounds the illusion of individual agency and obscures the systemic and racist roots of poverty (Bain, 2018). According to Apple, those in power have a vested interest in exporting crises away from themselves and shifting blame toward the individuals who suffer at the sharp end of these crises (2001, p. 146). Thus, it is arguably unsurprising that the DfE constitutes poverty — and therefore those in poverty — as a policy 'problem' where "no excuses" is being positioned as an appropriate solution.

4.4.2 Poverty discourses and QuantCrit

We have already demonstrated that "no excuse" schools are geographically racialised through the QuantCrit approach of interrogating quantitative data with 'voice and insight' (Gillborn, Warmington and Demack, 2018, p. 158). Because of

the heavy presence of poverty discourses in the eligible DfE content, to understand how “no excuses” functions in rhetoric and reality (Apple 1999; Diem *et al*, 2014), we need to see if they are borne out in the quantitative data. To do so, in the subsequent sections, I analyse the data in a manner similar to the QuantCrit analysis in section 4.2.

Just as before, I assume that if the DfE’s “no excuses” poverty rhetoric is borne out in reality, we would expect “no excuses” schools to have high levels of poverty, especially in relation to their local areas, LAs and regions. I drew on the 2019 ONS census data for the 70 eligible “no excuses” schools with available data that met the eligibility criteria in Chapter Three to examine their FSM compositions and Indices of Deprivation (IoD) scores. Because I use DfE and ONS data, I am bound by the same statistical assumptions, of which FSM eligibility issues are one.

4.4.2.a “No excuses” schools and FSMs

Because the DfE’s “no excuses” content is so saturated with FSM references, FSM is an apt measure to test the reality of their rhetoric despite its limitations (Kounali *et al*, 2008; Strand, 2014; Ilie, Sutherland and Vignoles, 2017; Taylor, 2018; Jerrim, 2020, 2021). In Table 4.8 (over), the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for FSM is compared to the proportion of pupils known to be eligible and claiming for FSM and the proportion of pupils known to be taking FSM at school, LA and region levels.

Referring to Table 4.8 (below), the two columns on the right are the results of a two-way paired Student's T-Test (calculated using Excel's 'T.TEST' function). As before, an asterisk (*) represents the statistical significance of a p-value of 0.05 or lower, two asterisks (**) represent 0.01 or lower and three asterisks (***) represent below 0.001 — the most robust statistical significance.

Table 4.8: Comparison of the proportion of pupils eligible for and claiming, taking and known to be eligible for free school meals at “no excuses” schools in relation to LA and regional level.¹⁷

	School level			LA level			Region level			T-Test School vs LA	T-Test School vs Region
	Ave	SD	SE	Ave	SD	SE	Ave	SD	SE	p-value	p-value
% of Pupils Known to Be Eligible for and Claiming Free School Meals	25.04 %	11.37	1.36	16.66 %	5.23	0.63	15.21 %	2.34	0.28	0.000** *	0.000** *
% of Pupils Taking Free School Meals on Census Day	22.07 %	10.72	1.28	13.51 %	4.49	0.54	12.17 %	2	0.24	0.000** *	0.000** *
% of Pupils Known to Be Eligible for Free School Meals (performance Tables)	25.51 %	11.77	1.41	17.48 %	5.38	0.64	16.02 %	2.42	0.29	0.000** *	0.000** *

***p≤.001, **p≤.01, *p≤.05

¹⁷ Source: Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2019 (Underlying data: Schools, pupils and their characteristics 2019; Schools_Pupils_and_their_Characteristics_2019_pupil_characteristics_UD.csv)

The latter two columns in Table 4.8 indicate the T-Test p-values between the average percentage of students in the “no excuses” schools who 1) *are* eligible for *and* claim FSMs (first row), 2) took FSMs on census day (second row) or 3) who are eligible for FSMs (third row) at school level, LA level and region level. If the DfE’s poverty and attainment gap “no excuses” poverty rhetoric was borne out in reality, we *would* expect a statistical difference between the FSM eligibility in “no excuses” schools in relation to their constituent LAs and regions. Because Table 4.8 indicates that the “no excuses” schools have a far higher proportion of pupils in all FSM categories than their constituent LAs and regions with a p-value of 0.001 (***) — an incredibly robust statistical significance — we can determine that in terms of FSM status, the DfE’s poverty rhetoric *is* borne out in reality.

4.4.2.b “No excuses” schools and ONS indices of deprivation

In Table 4.9 (over), I have compiled the sample “no excuses” schools’ Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI). Both are ONS statistical analyses, proxies for poverty and deprivation, and categorised into deciles. As with FSM, IMD and IDACI have detractors: they correlate only moderately with households’ ‘permanent income’ and ‘permanent income deprivation’ (Jerrim, 2021, p. 3) and can produce false positives and negatives (Boliver, Gorard and Siddiqui, 2022). However, because they aggregate data across locales, they offer supplementary appeal within the suite of proxies for poverty this study draws upon.

*Table 4.9: ONS indices of deprivation for the sample “no excuses” schools’ LSOA (Lower Layer Super Output Area) by decile.*¹⁸

Decile	Frequency in each Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) decile (where 1 is the most deprived 10% of LSOAs)	Frequency in each Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) decile (where 1 is the most deprived 10% of LSOAs)
1	19	17
2	13	14
3	8	10
4	11	5
5	7	6
6	2	7
7	5	8
8	6	2
9	3	4
10	0	1
Sum	74	74
Modal decile	1	1
Median decile	3	3

IMD represents an LSOA’s (Lower Layer Super Output Area) relative deprivation as a weighted amalgam of: “Income Deprivation (22.5%), Employment Deprivation (22.5%), Education, Skills and Training Deprivation (13.5%), Health Deprivation and Disability (13.5%), Crime (9.3%), Barriers to Housing and Services (9.3%), Living Environment Deprivation (9.3%)” (MHCLG, 2019a, p. 5).

The IDACI is a supplementary index to the IDM (MHCLG, 2019a, p. 4) that ‘measures the proportion of all children aged 0 to 15 living in income deprived families’ (MHCLG, 2019a, p. 1). Table 4.9 presents the frequency of “no excuses”

¹⁸ Source: MHCLG (2019b) English indices of deprivation 2019 (Underlying data: All ranks, deciles and scores for the indices of deprivation, and population denominators; File_7_-_All_IoD2019_Scores__Ranks__Deciles_and_Population_Denominators_3.csv)

schools in IDACI and IMD categories, where decile 1 refers to the most deprived 10% of LSOAs¹⁹.

At the bottom of the table are both the median and modal decile for IMD and IDACI for the sample “no excuses” schools; a representation of the mean would not be appropriate as both measures are categorised and, therefore, discrete data sets. The modal decile for the IMD and IDACI “no excuses” schools’ LSOAs is decile 1, constituting over 25% of schools for IMD (19 out of 74) and 23% for IDACI (17 schools). Similarly, the slightly higher median of decile 3 for both indicates that “no excuses” schools are in some of the most deprived LSOAs overall.

The most salient finding to highlight is that *the majority of sample schools* are in deciles 1 to 5 — 70% of schools (52 out of 74) for IDACI and 78% (58 out of 74) for IMD — representing the most deprived 50% of LSOAs; therefore, most of the present study’s sample “no excuse” schools are in the poorest local areas. As with the FSM data, from this analysis, we can determine that the DfE’s poverty rhetoric is a quantitative reality.

4.4.3 Why poverty and not race?

This is consistent with CRT’s tenet that racism is so entrenched in society that it is taken for granted (Rollock and Gillborn, 2011). On a superficial reading, poverty

¹⁹ Please note that the sum of schools is 74; all the sample “no excuses” schools’ postcodes correspond to LSOA data and are, therefore, present in the ONS’s datasets.

is not concerned with race — at least, that is how it is presented in the eligible DfE content. But because poverty is so racially loaded in the UK (Edminstron, Begum and Kataria, 2022, p. 2; IRRE, 2023; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2024), the DfE’s poverty discourses entail similar assumptions. Thus — in response to our research questions — the overt presence of poverty discourses surrounding “no excuses” and its racist underpinnings (RQ1) offer further weight to the racial pattern of the geography of “no excuses” via poverty demographics (RQ2). However, the framing of “no excuses” also functions to constitute racial policy problems and solutions.

4.4.3.a Framing “no excuses” as ‘success stories’

When a policy crosses international borders, it is often perceived to carry ‘credibility’ and ‘positive associations’ with ‘best practice’ (Peck and Theodore, 2010, p. 171). As seen in the introductory chapter, “no excuses” is one example, and the DfE highlights the model’s perceived successes and credibility throughout its content. For example, Gove²⁰ [2] lauds the perceived success of “no excuses” in the US through references to KIPP schools and Dobbie and Fryers’ (2011) work:

He [President Obama] has insisted — along with other Democrat reformers like Arne Duncan, Joel Klein and Michelle Rhee — that there be more great Charter schools — the equivalent of our Academies - to drive up attainment, especially among the poorest. In

²⁰ ‘Michael Gove to the National College Annual Conference, Birmingham’ (Speech, 25 November 2010)

New York, Charter schools — like the inspirational Knowledge is Power Programme schools — have dramatically narrowed the vast performance gap between **black and white children** and 91 per cent of those benefiting are on free or reduced-price meals.

Gove (2010a [2])

Despite one of the rare overt mentions of race in the DfE content, Gove frames the US success of “no excuses” through the prism of poverty, laying the foundations for its English recontextualisation. The DfE also draw on poverty when eulogising about English “no excuses” successes. For example, in his 2012 speech to the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), Gove²¹ [8] stated that ‘there is no such thing as an attainment gap at Cuckoo Hall or at Thomas Jones Primary’; both are “no excuses” schools (DfE, 2013; Yates, 2014) with high rates of FSM eligibility and EAL. Elsewhere, Gove likens “no excuses” to metaphorical social mobility ‘engines’, including in this example:

With a relentless focus on traditional subjects, a culture of no excuses, tough discipline, personalised pastoral care and enthusiastic staff who work free from Government bureaucracy to help every child succeed, these schools are amazing engines of social mobility that are now **sending children from ghetto areas** to elite universities.

²¹ ‘Education Secretary Michael Gove's speech to ASCL’ (Speech, 26 March 2012)

Further examples also demonstrate the DfE commentators' notions of the "no excuses" promise of mobility from 'inner-city' deprivation (compared to 'leafy suburbs' or 'pleasant rural towns'):

Table 4.10: Examples of "no excuses" successes in DfE texts.

Gove [7] ²²	And most importantly look what's happened here. In the Harris Academies. In ARK schools like Burlington Danes or King Solomon or Walworth Academy. In Mossbourne Academy and Manchester Academy. Children from the poorest homes going to the best universities. Exam performances better than scores of schools in the leafiest suburbs. Ofsted ratings which are consistently outstanding. [...] They called Phil Harris a threat 11 years ago; he's transformed the lives of hundreds of thousands. They said it was a threat when people from the City became involved in sponsoring schools - tell that to the children at King Solomon. The arguments being made in Haringey are the same ones that were made about Hackney Downs in 1995. Back then 11 per cent of children got 5 A* to C with English and maths. Now at Mossbourne 82 per cent in 2010 get 5 A* to C including English and maths, and ten students got offers to study at Cambridge this year.
Gove [8] ²³	We know they're wrong because there are schools in this country with very challenging intakes - with a higher than average proportion of children with special needs, a higher than average number eligible for free school meals , a higher than average number who don't have English as a first language - that outperform schools with much more favoured intakes in much wealthier areas.
Gibb [12] ²⁴	It is a remarkable fact that the best non-selective state secondary school in the country today, according to the 5 A*-to-C measure, is not situated in a middle-class suburb , or a pleasant rural town . Instead, it is situated in 1 of the most disadvantaged London wards for child poverty, and 41% of the school's pupils are eligible for free school meals - almost 3 times the national average. Yet at this school, King Solomon Academy, 95% of pupils gained 5 good GCSEs in 2015, and 77% of pupils passed the EBacc , an achievement which would have been branded fanciful at the time of their opening in 2009. In that year, King Solomon Academy was founded by Max Haimendorf as a 'new academy', and from its inception it used academy freedoms to break from the orthodoxies of English state-schooling. The behaviour and ethos of King Solomon Academy is explicitly modelled on the strict 'no

²² 'Michael Gove speech on academies' (Speech, 11 January 2012)

²³ 'Education Secretary Michael Gove's speech to ASCL' (Speech, 26 March 2012)

²⁴ 'Nick Gibb: the role of leadership in school improvement' (Speech, 9 May 2016)

	excuses' approach of American charter schools, but coupled with a deep concern for the well-being of the pupils - tough love, some may say.
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4.4.3.b Problematising attainment gaps as a policy problem

A common theme among all these examples is the focus on attainment data. The DfE appear particularly preoccupied with attainment gaps which feature in eight of the eligible texts. The DfE's gap-framing leans into the original rationale behind "no excuses" schools in the US (Carter, 2000; Thernstrom and Thernstrom, 2004; Whitman, 2008), but also exemplifies Lingard's (2011) 'policy as numbers' technology that has 'become the reductive norm for contemporary education policy at all levels of rescaled political authority and for new geographies of governance, across local, provincial, national, regional and global fields' (p. 357). In line with Lingard's point that numbers are used to diagnose problems and prescribe solutions, the DfE's gap rhetoric offers an apparently objective way of viewing poverty and wealth. In Gibb's²⁵ [3] press release, for example, the policy-and-solution-as-numbers (noted in square brackets) are unmistakable:

It is also why we are giving such a priority to **raising standards of behaviour in schools** [solution] and supporting teachers and headteachers in their effort to instil a **zero-tolerance approach to poor behaviour** [solution] and low level disruption in class.

We want to raise academic standards for all young people and to **close the attainment gap between those from poorer and**

²⁵ 'Schools Minister Nick Gibb responds to key stage 2 attainment statistics' (News Story, 9 December 2010)

wealthier backgrounds, so starkly demonstrated by today's figures [problem].

Gibb, 2010 [3]

Gove's²⁶ [8] assertion in the quotation in the previous section that 'there is no such thing as an attainment gap at Cuckoo Hall or at Thomas Jones Primary' — two "no excuses" schools — illustrates the way the proposed solution — "no excuses" — elides the problem — systemic inequality. As Walker-Johnson (2012) argues, the comparative metrics of the attainment gap are used to justify "'turnaround" as shock therapy' (p. 232) — a medical metaphor that aligns well with Lingard's diagnosis.

However, the attainment gap discourses draw on the same veils of objectivity and race-neutrality that QuantCrit challenges (Gillborn, 2005; Gillborn, Warmington and Demack, 2018; Crawford *et al*, 2018; Crawford, 2019; Green and Malcolm, 2023). Decisions of data categories, collection, and analyses are never race-neutral: they are socially constructed and thus susceptible to the same ingrained, naturalised racism that constitutes society (Crawford *et al*, 2018). The assessment data behind the attainment gap rhetoric represent White curricula and assumptions that 'every test taker is offered a fair and equal shot at educational, social, and economic achievement' (Au, 2015, p. 26). Standardised outcomes appear 'scientific' and therefore justify 'the existing racial order' (p. 27); the DfE's references to SATs and GCSE data across their content — particularly

²⁶ 'Education Secretary Michael Gove's speech to ASCL' (Speech, 26 March 2012)

when discussing the attainment gap — reinforce this notion. However, while built on racialised processes, race is virtually hidden in the DfE’s “no excuses” attainment gap discourses. While the original US “no excuse” proponents Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2004) explicitly reference the racial attainment gap regularly, the DfE only mention it once, when Gove²⁷ [2] linked the ‘Knowledge is Power Programme’ with a ‘dramatically narrowed [...] performance gap between black and white children’. Otherwise, the DfE are silent on racial gap discourses.

However, as we explored in Chapter Two, “no excuses” is associated with pernicious, brutal racialised harms. Indeed, Gregory *et al* (2010) argue that ‘disproportionate discipline might contribute to lagging achievement among students of colour’ (p. 59). Might the “no excuses” policy solution itself exacerbate the very racial attainment gap it is used as a solution for? Ladson-Billings’ (2006b) term *educational debt* helps us make sense of this question concerning the attainment gap: whereas *attainment gap* discourses focus on the present, *educational debt* foregrounds ‘historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral components’ (p. 3). This reframing helps us to understand the function of the DfE’s discourses: by focusing on the *attainment gap* rhetoric, the DfE elide the ‘historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral’ (Ladson-Billings, 2006b, p. 3) context that created the conditions for their proposed policy problem. Thus, between the racialised harms of “no excuses” and the DfE’s seemingly innocuous race-evasive attainment gap discourse, we can see how this particular policy-as-numbers formulation supports White supremacy.

²⁷ ‘Michael Gove to the National College Annual Conference, Birmingham’ (Speech, 25 November 2010)

Thus, we presently have a partial answer for RQ1: the DfE draws on discourses of poverty, which it constitutes as a problem for which “no excuses” is their solution, all while drawing on a race-evasive presentation of quantitative data through attainment gap rhetoric. Despite the evidence presented in this chapter that poverty *is* represented demographically in England’s “no excuses” schools, there is equally compelling quantitative and discursive evidence to suggest that race is as big a factor — if not bigger — than poverty in the DfE’s expansion of “no excuses”. Thus, we have found a clear difference in the rhetorical presentation of “no excuses” and its racialising reality, offering a partial response to RQ3. The next step is to speculate on the function of this difference.

4.5 “No excuses” as a spatial expression of racism

Earlier in this chapter, I argued that “no excuses” schools were surrounded by public discourses of poverty and attainment gaps in response to RQ1. However, in partial response to RQ3, I also argued that although ostensibly colour-evasive, the DfE’s urban discourses are racially coded and function as a dog whistle. While the urban references offer partial, indirect evidence of racial geographical patterns for “no excuses” schools (RQ2), section 4.2 shows an unequivocal racialised geographical pattern in reality (RQ3). So far, however, I have not explored how this racialised geography functions and how the urban discourses shape this function. In this section, I begin to add a geographical analysis (explored in Chapter Two, section 2.2.6.b) to this study’s interdisciplinary approach.

Space is a technology of power (Ford, 1992; Chari, 2008) that racialised organisations use to dominate and exploit populations (Delaney, 2002; Milner, 2012; Ray, 2019; Stewart, García and Petersen, 2021; Yazdiha, 2022; Williams *et al*, 2022). Thus, racialised geographies serve White supremacy (Gillborn, 2006a). Because the strategies and techniques of “no excuses” have been described as operating to control racialised populations (Piro, 2008; Kulz, 2013; Sondel, 2015b; Marsh, 2018; Golann, 2021; James-Gallaway, 2022), if the DfE’s promotion of “no excuses” is geographically racialised, that would mean we could reasonably consider them a racialised organisation. The evidence in this chapter illustrates precisely this: the sample “no excuses” schools are located in geographies with fewer White children and high proportions of children of colour. This is a tangible, physical expression of racial power. The DfE also avails itself of geographical discourses — especially *urban* discourses — which illustrate further how they express racial power cognitively and emotionally. However, while the DfE’s “no excuses” racialised geographies functionally support White supremacy broadly, what are the specific mechanisms by which they do so?

The first specific function is segregation. While the UK is already segregated into distinct racial communities (Mirza and Warwick, 2022; DEFRA, 2023), school choice policies — of which “no excuses” is framed — divide communities symbolically and physically, imbuing spaces with racial meaning (Johnston, Wilson and Burgess, 2007; Harris, 2013; Sondel, 2016; Yazdiha, 2022; Cordes and Laurito, 2023; Henry, 2019). Policymakers constitute these heavily racialised populations as problem populations that are sequestered or subject to harmful

interventions (Chari, 2008; Smith and Stovall, 2008; Kulz, 2013; Stewart, García and Petersen, 2021; Wiley, 2021). The DfE's rhetoric of 'poverty, low aspirations' and dumbing down' (Morgan²⁸, 2016 [13]), for example, frames the urban as problematic, with their proposed solution of sequestering and containing at the heart of "no excuses" dividing communities further, even within a school (Smith and Stovall, 2008; Kulz, 2013; 2019; Golann, 2021; James-Gallaway, 2022).

Borders also divide communities. While national borders are mappable, racial borders are often invisible. In Chapter Two, we explored the invisible borders described by Du Bois's 'colour-lines' (Du Bois, 2008; Vélez and Solórzano, 2018) and Blaut's (1974) ghettos that are felt and identified by their racialised populations. My study cannot purport to demarcate racialised borders, even if possible. However, if landscapes are texts of sorts (Price, 2010), this study's "no excuses" schools are landmarks to read. Landmarks enable people to locate their position by their salience; the sample "no excuses" schools' demographics in relation to their LAs and regions enables us to recognise them as salient points on a racialised landscape. While we cannot see any borders, "no excuses" conspicuous racialised character stands out in stark relief to the demographic landscapes they inhabit.

These racialised geographies are not coincidental. Given that the DfE regularly link *urban* discourses and "no excuses", we might reasonably assume a conscious effort to direct "no excuses" to urban areas; given that urban

²⁸ 'Nicky Morgan: a world-class education system for every child' (Speech, 24 February 2016)

discourses are racially loaded, we might also assume that there is a direct intentionality to the racialised nature of the policy.

In Chapter Two, we explored how *ghettoes* are considered sites of internal neo-colonialism characterised by high racial segregation, populations that authorities consider problematic, and high levels of policing and violence (Harris, 1972; Blaut, 1974; Allen, 2005; Turner, 2018). Gove's²⁹ (2010 [2]) direct reference to the 'ghetto' enables us to draw parallels between "no excuses" and internal neo-colonialism. We have already made the case in this chapter that "no excuses" constitutes racialised populations as problematic, and in Chapter Two, we explored the brutal, racial violence of the policing-oriented 'zero-tolerance' movement (Skiba and Peterson, 1999; Hirschfield, 2008; Greene, 2014; Skiba, Arredondo and Williams, 2014; Golann, 2021; James-Gallaway, 2022).

Another key feature of internal colonisation is economic exploitation (Harris, 1972; Blaut, 1974; Allen, 2005; Bonds and Inwood, 2016). In the eligible texts, the DfE regularly connect "no excuses" and economic discourses, as illustrated in the examples of Table 4.11 (over).

²⁹ 'Michael Gove to the National College Annual Conference, Birmingham' (Speech, 25 November 2010)

Table 4.11: Examples of economic discourses in DfE texts.

Gove [2]³⁰	For the fourth-largest economy in the world, with a much higher than average level of investment in education and some of the most talented professionals anywhere in the globe, this [educational] performance simply isn't good enough.' And far from difficult economic times being a reason to scale down our ambitions, the economic challenges we face are only reason to accelerate our reform programme.
Gove [8]³¹	And lest anyone think we should slacken the pace of reform - let me reassure them - we have to accelerate. Over the next ten years the world we inhabit will change massively. We are at an inflection point in the economic and educational development of nations. Technology will change out of all recognition how individuals work, how we teach and how students learn. Millions more across the globe will go onto higher - and post-graduate education. Globalisation will see the number of unskilled or low skilled jobs in this country diminish further and the rewards to those with higher level qualifications continue to soar further ahead. [...] We need to ensure every child achieves their fullest potential because we need every mind motivated to succeed if our society as a whole is to prosper.
Wilshaw [10]³²	Some of its wards are steeped in poverty, low aspiration and generations of unemployment. But its schools have a culture of no excuses, demanding high standards from all children, no matter what their background. Results have vastly improved since all headteachers began working together in clusters, poring over results, sharing expertise, having frank discussions about each other's strengths and weaknesses and taking responsibility for all children in the borough.
Gibb [11]³³	An informative article by 3 economists from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the University of California appeared in the American Economic Journal 2 years ago. The findings of the Massachusetts project are being replicated right across America. Four economists from MIT and Duke University produced a paper last year which showed that Charter School takeovers - the American equivalent of an academy conversion - by schools with a 'no excuses' approach showed "substantial achievement gains for a highly disadvantaged student population" in New Orleans.

³⁰ 'Michael Gove to the National College Annual Conference, Birmingham' (Speech, 25 November 2010)

³¹ 'Education Secretary Michael Gove's speech to ASCL' (Speech, 26 March 2012)

³² 'SCHOOLS NorthEast Summit 2015' (Speech, 15 October 2015)

³³ 'Nick Gibb: how autonomy raises standards' (Speech, 12 November 2015)

In addition to these direct references to economic imperatives, the DfE's preoccupation with poverty betrays their tacit desire to 'extract the maximum amount of wealth' (Blaut, 1974, p. 39) from their urban populations. Through these discourses, the DfE meets the final definitive internal colonisation feature: economic dominance and exploitation.

Thus, in response to RQ3, ***we can argue that the “no excuses” policy functions as an internal colonisation, both in rhetoric and reality.*** That their discourses might be considered a dog whistle strengthens this further: constantly speaking of the *urban* helps to draw a distinction between the non-poor Whites and the people of colour outside the White hegemonic alliance (Allen, 2009) and reinforces the felt borders. The brutality of “no excuses” also constitutes a reminder of the oppression exerted on those outside the alliance. Thus, through internal colonisation, not only do the DfE subjugate a racialised population, but they signal to their allies their power.

4.6 Conclusion

The overarching question of this study asks if the growth and establishment of “no excuses” schools in England are a racialised policy agenda. By reading the landscape as an internal colony, we can construct an argument that, yes, it is a racialised policy. The physical and discursive geographies of “no excuses” reify internal colonies for White supremacy and domination. However, the geographically racialised reality of “no excuses” (RQ2) — in addition to its ostensibly colour-evasive but racially coded discourses (RQ1) — renders race an

absent presence (Apple, 1999). Their latent racial meaning in their colour-evasive rhetoric is only thinly veiled and thus allows it to function as a dog whistle to the White hegemonic alliance (Allen, 2009) (RQ3). While the DfE's race-evasion might enable them to plead ignorance, at best, the heavily racialised geographical reality of "no excuses" constitutes tacit intentionality (Gillborn, 2005). At worst, the DfE's thinly veiled urban discourses and engagement with the "no excuses" literature suggest a more invidious intentionality. Where CRT expects educational policy to support White supremacy and render it normal and unremarkable, "no excuses" duly obliges.

Chapter 5: Framing the frontier: reifying white saviours and a missionary frontier through “no excuses”

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we explored the public discourses surrounding “no excuses” (RQ1) and found that the DfE largely employed colour-evasive rhetoric that was geographically racially patterned (RQ2) and constituted urban areas as internal colonies (RQ3).

Bradbury (2020) urges us to challenge how policy constitutes groups of individuals as either part of problems or solutions and how policies ‘present those in power as caring about racial equity (even where this is not the result’ (p. 247) using Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Policy Analysis (CPA). While we have looked at how the DfE constitutes people of colour through “no excuses”, we have not looked at how the DfE frames itself and White policy actors of “no excuses” or how DfE uses “no excuses” to serve White supremacy. This chapter will address these themes in light of RQs one and three:

- RQ1: What public discourses surround “no excuses” schools?
- RQ3: How does the “no excuses” policy function in rhetoric and reality?

To address RQ1, I will examine the self-presentation of policy actors through “no excuses” discourses and argue that the DfE constitutes itself as White saviours. I then use Cole’s (2012) White Saviour Industrial Complex (introduced in Chapter Two) to consider the discursive functions of “no excuses”, thus addressing RQ3. In doing so, I argue that “no excuses” represents a quasi-religious crusade of the urban as an internal colony.

To address these questions in this chapter, I take an interdisciplinary approach as outlined in Chapter Three. In particular, I draw on the disciplines of geography, education and race research as interdisciplinary ensembles with a precedent in the research of David Stovall (Smith and Stovall, 2008; Stovall, 2006; 2010; 2018; Horsford *et al*, 2019) and Chris Taylor (Taylor and Gorard, 2001; Taylor, 2009a; 2009b; Power and Taylor, 2013), for example. Indeed, the combination of geography and Critical Race Theory constitutes this chapter's major substantive empirical and methodological contribution, which I will later contextualise as a racialised frontier.

5.2 The white saviour: the (maverick) hero discourses of “no excuses”

A core discursive theme in the DfE’s “no excuses” rhetoric is their presentation of themselves and “no excuses” policy actors as praiseworthy. This trope is almost

ubiquitous in the DfE content: White saviour discourses are apparent in eleven texts³⁴.

In Chapter Two, we drew on Cole's (2012) *White Saviour Industrial Complex* definition:

The white saviour supports brutal policies in the morning, founds charities in the afternoon, and receives awards in the evening. (p. 1)

Cole's metaphor foregrounds the problematic duality that White supremacy's benevolence is made possible by its brutality. When it congratulates itself publicly, White supremacy gains unwarranted legitimacy. Because Cole's definition addresses all these things, it is a suitable platform to analyse the DfE's White saviourism. As such, I will use Cole's three phases to structure the following sections.

5.3 Gove's "magnificent seven" and white saviourism

In his speech to the ASCL on 26th March 2012, Michael Gove [8] marked out seven school leaders by name, referring to them as the *magnificent seven*:

But there's a special reason I mention these magnificent seven today.

And it goes to the heart of the moral purpose of this Government. [...]

³⁴ See Appendix 4 for a summary.

But our education system — our country — is still held back by two weaknesses. We have — for generations — failed to stretch every child to the limit of their ability. And we have — for all our lifetimes — failed the poorest most of all. And tackling these problems for me isn't just business, it's personal.

The 'Magnificent Seven' (1960) is a classic Western movie in which a gunslinger enlists six other gunslingers to save Mexican villagers from being attacked by bandits (IMDb, no date). Its movie poster (figure 5.1) is iconic: seven rugged male horse riders — all White — cross the wild US terrain. When Gove directly mentions the Magnificent Seven, it very effectively conjures this image, arguably forging a connection between his seven leaders and the film characters:

Figure 5.1: The Magnificent Seven (1960) movie poster



Whiteness is a dramatic act where its social actors present different faces to different audiences (Gillborn, 2005). The film exemplifies this: while each of the film's protagonists has a morally questionable history, by guiding 'people of colour from the margins to the mainstream' they demonstrate their 'initiative and benevolence' (Camarota, 2011, p. 243). As such, the film is about social justice and redemption (Alexander, 2021) and taming the wildness of the 'other' as represented by the Mexican bandits and hapless villagers. The official publicity shot — Figure 5.2 (below) — captures this tension: each of the Magnificent Seven brandishes a weapon ready to fire at the (presumably) Mexican bandits — a symbol of a morally suspect 'other' — while protecting the humble Mexican village behind them — a symbol of a weak, subservient 'other'.

Figure 5.2: The Magnificent Seven (1960) publicity image



By directly referencing 'The Magnificent Seven', Gove arguably draws attention to a favourable view of the "no excuses" leaders as similarly rugged, brave and

socially oriented. In the drama of the policy arena (Gillborn, 2005), Gove reifies White saviours through the Magnificent Seven allusion. Simultaneously, while rendering these heroes as benevolent, the Magnificent Seven trope also renders 'people of colour' as 'incapable of helping themselves' (p. 243); the film's Mexican villagers enact this role perfectly. Thus, Gove's Magnificent Seven reference casts "no excuses" racial recipients as problems, and at the same time, it casts "no excuses" leaders as solutions (Lingard, 2011).

The 2016 reboot of *The Magnificent Seven* (see Figure 5.3, below) illustrates the enduring salience of the tropes. Indeed, the reboot's tagline, 'Justice has a number', perfectly captures the essence of Lingard's (2011) argument that numbers are used to constitute problems and solutions. Perhaps unwittingly, this also adds to the heavy racial loading of Gove's Magnificent Seven reference:

Figure 5.3: The Magnificent Seven (2016)



Gove's speech offers other invocations of the White saviour. Gove name-checks overtly knowledge-rich, "no excuses" school leaders in his 'magnificent seven', often by alluding to academic or economic salvation. For example, Gove [8] promotes a Barnfield Federation leader who ensures his students from 'overwhelmingly [...] disadvantaged homes' 'who have struggled most at primary' get 'an amazing technical and academic education'. He also exalts Jerry Collins — a leader of a school in the explicitly "no excuses" Futures Academy MAT (CSJ, 2011) — for recording 'the fastest progress yet in taking a school from categories to outstanding' and for ensuring his children — 'overwhelmingly from disadvantaged backgrounds' — 'can out-compete privately educated children' (Gove, 2012a [8]). These are only two examples of how Gove presents his magnificent seven as White saviours; a full list of the organisations and policy actors referred to in the DfE content is available in Appendix 5. What jumps out of these examples, however, is Gove's use of 'overwhelmingly', indicating the kind of hapless, objectified 'other' the film also depicts (Alexander, 2021).

Gove's classic Western White saviour trope is in line with Kulz's (2013) observation of Sir Michael Wilshaw — former Mossbourne Academy leader and Chief Inspector of Schools in England and head of Ofsted — as a Lone Ranger-esque 'Empire-BUILDER and Bringer of Happiness' (p. 123) who 'assumes the combined role of saviour, hero, military commander and business executive' (p. 120). Alone, Gove's Magnificent Seven allusion affords strong evidence that ***White saviourism is one of the public discourses surrounding "no excuses"*** (RQ1).

The ‘magnificent seven’ allusion also brings another geographical dimension to the fore. Biben (2021) argues that the American myth of the Western frontier — as codified in Western movies with ‘cowboys, outlaws, dusty salons, savage Indians and hardworking miners’ (p. 22) — is built upon colonial ideals that overlook the reality of destruction and ethnic violence. However, she also notes that the Western frontier — like any frontier — is more akin to a zone than a border. For Nail (2016), the frontier is ‘part of the border’s process of continual motion’ (p. 47), a concept that aligns with my argument that “no excuses” functions as a process of internal colonisation in Chapter Four, section 4.5. Thus, through these entailments of the ‘magnificent seven’ trope, Gove also reifies a sense of a colonial frontier, which I contextualise in section 5.6 of this chapter.

5.4 Brutal policies in the morning: tough, unapologetic policies for tough, unapologetic heroes

White saviourism serves many functions. For Cole (2012), it constitutes ‘a big emotional experience that validates privilege’ (p. 2), while for Vera and Gordon (2003), it ‘presents whites with pleasing images of themselves as saviours rather than oppressors of those of other races’ (p. 116). Gove’s magnificent seven allusion certainly appeals and accords with Vera and Gordon’s observation that White saviours construct themselves as ‘powerful, handsome, brave, cordial, kind, firm and generous’ (p. 116). Of these, the brave and firm characteristics are most apparent in the DfE’s “no excuses” content.

These two characteristics are readily apparent in the DfE's toughness discourses; the DfE refer to the word tough (and its derivatives and synonyms) in seven texts, as illustrated in Table 5.1:

Table 5.1: Quotations from the DfE content exemplifying militaristic discourses

Gove [1] ³⁵	Our Education and Children's Bill in the autumn will put heads and teachers back in control , giving them a range of tough new powers to deal with bullies and the most disruptive pupils . These are the measures that will put heads and teachers back in control so they can enforce discipline in their schools and tackle bullying . I'll also give teachers the right to remove disruptive children.
Gove [2] ³⁶	The political leadership is uncompromising in the drive for higher standards. There is a culture of high expectations which does not allow excuses to be made for poor performance on the basis of class, ethnicity or background . [...] If you look at the most successful education systems in the world - those with the best absolute performance - and those with the highest levels of equity across classes - they all tend to have certain common features. [...] They extend a high level of autonomy to individual schools... School leaders are empowered to innovate in their own schools. [...] And they are expected to lead the drive for improvement in other schools. [...] The political leadership is uncompromising in the drive for higher standards . [...] There is a culture of high expectations which does not allow excuses to be made for poor performance on the basis of class, ethnicity or background.
Gove [9] ³⁷	Alongside our measures to give teachers powers to search pupils and impose same-day detentions, this demonstrates our determination to get tough on bad behaviour . Education Secretary Michael Gove said: There is no excuse for skipping school. We have taken action to reduce absence by increasing fines and encouraging schools to address the problem earlier.
Wilshaw [10] ³⁸	Whilst you ponder that one, here are a few more questions for you to consider. As a leader, are you standing firm against the insidious anti-learning, low aspiration culture that often pervades non-immigrant communities in this country? Are you the type of leader who refuses to accept the status quo or cultural norms and, indeed, fights against them? The type of leader who doesn't worry that confiscating mobile phones or banning chewing gum could infringe human rights? The type of leader who is not afraid to challenge those parents who refuse to support the school? Or are you what I call a cultural appeaser, more inclined to concede than challenge accepted norms?
Gibb [12] ³⁹	Ever since she burst onto the public stage in 2010, I have been a great admirer of Katharine Birbalsingh. She is currently running a free school in Wembley which shows an admirable disregard for the way in which English schools are normally operated. [...] And, if visitors to the school do not like what they see, Katharine says 'tough' - they must reserve judgement until the school's first set of GCSE results in 3 years' time.
Morgan	The school was founded by a 28-year-old head named Max Haimendorf, and from its inception he has used academy freedoms to break from the standard practices of English state schooling...The behaviour and ethos of King Solomon Academy is modelled on the 'no excuses' approach of American

³⁵ 'Michael Gove on bullying and bad classroom discipline in 'News of the World' (Article, 7 September 2010)

³⁶ 'Michael Gove to the National College Annual Conference, Birmingham' (Speech, 25 November 2010)

³⁷ '130,000 fewer pupils regularly missing school' (Press release, 25 March 2014)

³⁸ 'SCHOOLS NorthEast Summit 2015' (Speech, 15 October 2015)

³⁹ 'Nick Gibb: the importance of school leadership' (Speech, 26 January 2016)

[13] ⁴⁰	charter schools, and this is coupled with a deep concern for the well-being of the pupils. [...] As our free school and academy reforms mature, I am certain that we will see, and in fact we are already seeing, more brave and free-thinking school leaders , like Max, whose pupils achieve previously inconceivable feats under their charge.
Gibb [14] ⁴¹	From its inception, King Solomon Academy created an ethos-based on no-excuses school discipline, and unapologetically high academic expectations ... We have a profession that is embracing an evidence based approach to the curriculum and pedagogy - new institutions such as Research Ed, founded by Tom Bennett and the Knowledge Network, a grouping of teachers committed to a knowledge rich curriculum. This government's reforms have been the most radical and far reaching since the 1944 Butler Act. That's why, on occasion, they attract controversy. Our reforms are designed to deliver more schools like King Solomon ; non-selective schools achieving GCSE results that exceed those of many selective independent schools.

Nick Gibb's⁴² (2016 [12]) speech to the school subscription service, The Key, is a prime example:

The behaviour and ethos of King Solomon Academy is explicitly modelled on the strict 'no excuses' approach of American charter schools, but coupled with a deep concern for the well-being of the pupils - tough love, some may say.

Of note here is the oxymoron, 'tough love': Gibb presents toughness not only as a counterbalance for love but as a part of love. This example is illustrative of Vera and Gordon's (2003) 'powerful, handsome, brave, cordial, kind, firm and generous' (p. 116) and Cammarota's (2011) 'benevolence' (p. 243).

⁴⁰ 'Nicky Morgan: a world-class education system for every child' (Speech, 24 February 2016)

⁴¹ 'Nick Gibb: the role of leadership in school improvement' (Speech, 9 May 2016)

⁴² 'Nick Gibb: the role of leadership in school improvement' (Speech, 9 May 2016)

The DfE use toughness elsewhere to frame “no excuses” leaders directly. For example, Charlie Taylor⁴³ (in Gove, 2010 [5]) is introduced to us as having worked ‘in tough inner city primary and comprehensive schools’, and one of Gove’s ‘magnificent seven’⁴⁴ [8] is described as working in a school that ‘draws students from some of the toughest parts of London’. In both these examples, we can see that when ‘toughness’ is conferred to its leaders, it is often demonstrated through an objectified racial other such as the ‘inner city’ and ‘parts of London’, part of the racially coded urban discourses we examined in Chapter Four.

Other ‘toughness’ examples illustrate the maverick leadership courted by the DfE, including this 2016 speech by Gibb⁴⁵ [12]:

The political leadership is **uncompromising** in the drive for higher standards [...] Ever since she burst onto the public stage in 2010, I have been a great admirer of Katharine Birbalsingh. She is currently running a free school in Wembley, which shows an **admirable disregard** for the way in which English schools are normally operated [...] And, if visitors to the school do not like what they see, **Katharine says ‘tough’** [...] But we also need to be **unapologetic about tackling failure** where it occurs.

Gibb (2016a [12])

⁴³ ‘New powers for teachers to improve discipline in schools’ (Press release, 4 April 2011)

⁴⁴ ‘Education Secretary Michael Gove’s speech to ASCL’ (Speech, 26 March 2012)

⁴⁵ ‘Nick Gibb: the role of leadership in school improvement’ (Speech, 9 May 2016)

The toughness desired by the DfE, then, is wrapped in maverick propensities; Gibb's overlexification (Machin and Mayr, 2012) emphasises tacit advocacy for maverick leaders whose toughness is expressed through single-mindedness and an oppositional nature. Indeed, in endorsing Katherine Birbalsingh's (2016) 'Battle Hymn of the Tiger Teachers', Gibb praises her school for being 'iconoclastic' (p. 3). The fact the DfE promote maverick tendencies that would not be acceptable for "no excuses" pupils and teachers illustrates perfectly the White privilege that underpins the policy framing.

5.4.1 "No excuses": just tough or brutal?

As seen in the previous section, 'toughness' pervades the DfE content. Not only do they exalt people demonstrating toughness, but the DfE's policy actors also advocate for tough acts, such as "tough new powers" (Gove [1]), and a "relentless focus on traditional subjects, a culture of no excuses" and "tough discipline" (Gove [2]). In linking "no excuses" with these discourses, the DfE emphasise the toughness of the policy and its advocates. But could we reasonably consider "no excuses" as brutal as in Cole's (2012) metaphor?

As I argued in Chapter Two, "no excuses" could be considered as rooted in brutality with its broken windows and zero-tolerance origins (Skiba and Peterson, 1999; Zweiflyer, 2002; Whitman, 2008) and the keenly felt harms of those who experience it (Kulz, 2013; Golann, Debs and Weiss, 2019; Cushing, 2022; James-Gallaway, 2022). This brutality has been labelled as militaristic by researchers (Lack, 2009; Kulz, 2013; Sondel, 2015b; James-Gallaway, 2022).

The DfE leans into military discourses in its “no excuses” content, referring variously to ‘crusading’ (Gove⁴⁶ [2]), ‘enemies’ (Gove⁴⁷ [7]), and ‘combat’ (Gove⁴⁸ [13]) (see more in Appendix 6). In doing so, it presents an undercurrent of battling for and through “no excuses”, offering a discursive backdrop for its toughness and brutality. It is found elsewhere from “no excuses” proponents such as in Birbalsingh’s (2016) book ‘Battle Hymn of the Tiger Teachers: the Michaela Way’. While the DfE clearly portrays the policy as tough and brutal and a battle, it is far less clear who the DfE are battling. Their vague allusions to ‘defeating [...] forces’ (Gove⁴⁹, [8]) and caricatures of ‘ideologues and enemies of promise’ (Gove⁵⁰ [7]) represent strawman arguments.

Gove — author of many of these discourses — is well known for criticising — even ‘savaging’ — opponents and allies alike (Bull, 2019; BBC, 2022; 2023; National.Cymru, 2022; Paterson, 2022; Seddon, 2022; Harris, 2023). Thus, we can reasonably assume that if there was a real enemy, Gove would name them in these militaristic discourses; his vagueness, therefore, constitutes strawman arguments (OED, 2023), which are simultaneously fallacious, persuasive and difficult-to-challenge (Walton, 1996; Bizer, Koyak and Holterman, 2009; de

⁴⁶ ‘...Harold Wilson once said of the Labour Party, it is a **moral crusade** or it is nothing. Well, whatever view one takes of the Labour Party’s history, I believe that we have to ensure there is a driving, crusading, vision at the heart of our Government’s education policy.’

⁴⁷ ‘...**Some**, however, are being obstructive. They are putting the ideology of central control ahead of the interests of children. They are more concerned with protecting old ways of working than helping the most disadvantaged children succeed in the future. Anyone who cares about social justice must want us to **defeat these ideologues and liberate the next generation** from a history of failure.’

The same ideologues who are happy with failure - **the enemies of promise** - also say you can’t get the same results in the inner cities as the leafy suburbs so it’s wrong to stigmatise these schools.’

⁴⁸ ‘...This combination of moral purpose and business acumen led to the creation of a school which would **combat** the low expectations, poor behaviour and dumbing down that had so long been synonymous with inner-city schools.’

⁴⁹ ‘...I am an enemy of all the forces of social stagnation. And there are no better allies to have in **defeating those forces** than all of you. It is to **defeating those forces** that I know all your amazing hard and tireless work is dedicated - for which I thank you.’

⁵⁰ ‘...**The same ideologues** who are happy with failure - **the enemies of promise** - also say you can’t get the same results in the inner cities as the leafy suburbs so it’s wrong to stigmatise these schools.’

Saussure, 2018). While these arguments could constitute White ignorance (Bain, 2018), their regular use and their cooccurrence with the persuasive tropes of toughness indicate a far less tacit intention to misrecognise (Apple, 1999; Gillborn, 2005). Perhaps Wilshaw's⁵¹ [10] speech, most aptly exemplifies these strawman tropes and the brutal discourses of toughness and military fervour. In this speech, he employed no fewer than ten rhetorical questions. He asks many times, 'Are you the type of leader[...]?' before sketching caricatures of leaders who are 'standing firm' or who act as a 'cultural appeaser'. While Wilshaw's overwhelming volume of rhetorical questions indicates a strong desire to persuade, they also evoke a tone evocative of a military rally. As such, these examples invoke a sense of tough, maverick brutality that Cole (2012) characterises in the morning phase of the White Saviour Industrial Complex. ***Performative toughness and brutality, then, are core discourses surrounding "no excuses" schools*** (RQ1).

5.4.2 The brutal "no excuses" ironies serving White supremacy

While "no excuses" is discursively presented as brutal, a question remains: *how* do these discourses function (RQ3)? We have only briefly touched on how these 'tough', 'maverick characteristics' are not afforded to teachers and pupils in "no excuses" schools. This, in-and-of-itself, is a similarly brutal irony. "No excuses" originated from KIPP's inaugurators, Feinberg and Levin, in response to feeling 'stymied' in their 'pedagogical creativity' and identified an 'over-centralised bureaucracy' (Lack, 2009, p. 128). The irony is that their organisation — and "no

⁵¹ 'SCHOOLS NorthEast Summit 2015' (Speech, 15 October 2015)

excuses” broadly — is criticised for being very heavily centralised and rigid, with systems that afford its teachers no — or very little — pedagogical creativity (Sondel, 2016; Graham, 2017). Indeed, this is the same irony the DfE peddle: teacher autonomy discourses saturate the “no excuses” content and are present in eleven texts. Key examples of this include behaviour policy reform that ‘restores adult authority to the classroom’ (Gove, 2011⁵² [5]) and makes ‘adult authority unquestioned’ (Gove, 2012b⁵³ [8]) while ‘strengthening teachers’ powers to discipline pupils’ (Gibb, 2016b⁵⁴ [14])⁵⁵. We know from Chapter Two that “no excuses” denies — or at least severely limits — teacher and leader autonomy (e.g. Torres, 2014; 2016a; 2016b; 2016c; 2019; Sondel, 2015a; 2015b; 2016; Golann, 2018; 2021; Golann and Jones, 2021; Marsh and Wilkerson, 2021; James-Gallaway, 2022). To entice teachers and leaders towards “no excuses” with a rhetoric of autonomy despite the reality represents a brutal misrecognition.

Another brutal irony is the notion that “no excuses” is positioned as radical. Wilshaw⁵⁶ [10], for example, argues that ‘[w]ithout a radical change now, we will see more social and economic division in this country’, and Gibb⁵⁷ [14] exalts his government’s reforms for being ‘the most radical and far-reaching since the 1944 Butler Act [that are] designed to deliver more schools like King Solomon’. However, elsewhere, Gibb⁵⁸ [11] promotes “no excuses” on the basis that it ‘emphasises discipline and comportment, traditional reading and math skills,

⁵² ‘New powers for teachers to improve discipline in schools’ (Press release, 4 April 2011)

⁵³ ‘Education Secretary Michael Gove’s speech to ASCL’ (Speech, 26 March 2012)

⁵⁴ ‘Nick Gibb: the role of leadership in school improvement’ (Speech, 9 May 2016)

⁵⁵ See Appendix 8 for more examples.

⁵⁶ ‘SCHOOLS NorthEast Summit 2015’ (Speech, 15 October 2015)

⁵⁷ ‘Nick Gibb: the role of leadership in school improvement’ (Speech, 9 May 2016)

⁵⁸ ‘Nick Gibb: how autonomy raises standards’ (Speech, 12 November 2015)

instruction time, and selective teacher hiring’, and Gove⁵⁹ [2] eulogises “no excuses” ‘relentless focus on traditional subjects’. These cakeist (Musolff, 2020) ironies are consistent with the misrecognition, doublespeak and White ignorance described by Apple (2006), Ahmed (2006), Smith (2023), and Bain (2018).

The DfE’s policy actors pervert this irony further in their associated ‘orthodox’ and ‘dogma’ discourses. Gibb⁶⁰ [14] in particular, laments the ‘prevailing education orthodoxies’ [14], but finds solace in “no excuses” leaders ‘like Joe Kirby, Katie Ashford and Rob Peal’ and how schools like King Solomon Academy actively ‘break from the orthodoxies of English state-schooling’ [12]⁶¹. A further irony is that these two speeches were made in 2016. If these orthodoxies are attributable to anyone, it is to the government that has presided over them for over half a decade. Nevertheless, Gibb uses these discourses to launch brutal attacks on the status quo, albeit his vague strawman references rule out the possibility that these are direct attacks. These ironies align with the findings of US researchers, who argue that “no excuses” saturates US policy and where opponents are considered heretical (Henry, 2019); by adopting the orthodoxy irony, the DfE draws on the same policy framing.

Why does it matter that the DfE employ these ironies? What functions might they serve (RQ3)? Considering conservatism’s preoccupation with a ‘romantic appraisal with the past’ (Apple, 2006, p.39), these ironies are expected. The framing of teacher and leader authority aligns with Lakoff’s (2002) conception of

⁵⁹ ‘Michael Gove to the National College Annual Conference, Birmingham’ (Speech, 25 November 2010)

⁶⁰ ‘Nick Gibb: the role of leadership in school improvement’ (Speech, 9 May 2016)

⁶¹ ‘Nick Gibb: the importance of school leadership’ (Speech, 26 January 2016)

the conservative ‘strict father morality’ which prizes metaphors such as ‘moral authority’ (p. 100). This particular metaphor entails a sense of ‘resentment’ of meddling by any illegitimate authority. Such discourses, therefore, also align with Cole’s (2012) ‘big emotional experience’ (p. 1) at the heart of White saviourism. However, this metaphor’s assumptions also offer the basis for its own critique: just as policymakers and leaders may resent meddling, the teachers and children at their sharp ends also have grounds to be aggrieved.

White saviour emotions aside, these ironies have a disproportionate racial impact. We know that “no excuses” are associated with significant racialised harm (Morris, 2005; Skiba, Arredondo and Williams, 2014; Offutt-Chaney, 2019; James-Gallaway, 2022; Marsh and Walker, 2022; Sevon, 2022; Cushing, 2023b; Skiba, Fergus and Gregory, 2023) such as pedagogical impoverishment (Sondel, 2015a; 2015b; 2016; Graham, 2017; Ellison and Iqtadar, 2020; Golann, 2021), psychological harm to pupils (Horn, 2010; Ellison, 2012; Goodman and Uzon, 2013; Perry and Morris, 2014; Dishon and Goodman, 2017; Lamboy and Lu, 2017; Bailey *et al*, 2019; James-Gallaway, 2022), diminished teacher wellbeing and teacher retention issues (Torres, 2014; 2016a; 2016b; 2016c; Bailey *et al*, 2019; Golann, 2021; Waychunas, 2022). The previous chapter’s analysis also shows that England’s “no excuses” schools are geographically racialised. The DfE’s ironies directly impact the practices of (racialised) organisations (Ray, 2019). Their inherent misrecognition, however, obscures both race and racial impact. ***The DfE’s duplicities — despite being largely rhetorical — have real-world, racialised consequences*** (RQ3). Simultaneously, the DfE promote the racial harms of “no excuses” while coming across as benevolent, ‘tough love’

mavericks. Their policies and the discourses that surround the policies, thus, function brutally, as Cole's (2012) metaphor suggests. In this way, the 'magnificent seven' allusion becomes ever more relevant. Just as the movie's seven gunslingers employ their brutality with devastating racialised outcomes, the English neo-conservative political position of being above the law (O'Brien, 2023) finds its representation in "no excuses" through the DfE's policy actors' 'admirable disregard for the way in which English schools are normally operated' (Gibb [12]⁶², [14]⁶³).

5.4.3 Charity in the afternoon: the moral purpose of "no excuses"

So far, we have established that "no excuses" — as a brutal, harmful policy — functions to elevate its proponents as White saviours who invoke tough, maverick discourses, the kinds of which we might see in Gove's 'magnificent seven' allusions. As Cole's (2012) metaphor suggests in his 'founds charities' in the afternoon phase (p. 2), the DfE also portray themselves as benevolent.

Contemporary White saviourism is often expressed through charity and benevolence (Vera and Gordon, 2003; Cammarota, 2011; Brown, 2013). For White (2015), the noble-minded White is a quintessential trope (p. 125). For Bandyopadhyay (2019), White saviourism is not only underpinned by 'invasive' (p. 328) development activities but is often associated with White Christianity. These tropes permeate the DfE's "no excuses" content⁶⁴. For example, Gove's

⁶² 'Nick Gibb: the importance of school leadership' (Speech, 26 January 2016)

⁶³ 'Nick Gibb: the role of leadership in school improvement' (Speech, 9 May 2016)

⁶⁴ See Appendix 4 for more examples.

[8] ‘magnificent seven’ alone invokes this benevolence, with its seven White males saving the apparently hapless Mexican farmers (Alexander, 2021). His claim that “no excuses” schools are ‘amazing engines of social mobility that are now sending children from ghetto areas to elite universities’ (Gove, 2010b⁶⁵ [2]) also exemplifies this sense of benevolence.

However, this quotation also demonstrates the same objectification of the racialised other as Willuweit describes elsewhere (2020). The schools are presented as engines — implying a machine-like quality — which act to send objectified children from ghetto areas — as objects of these machines — to university. The impersonal children could thus be considered artefacts of White oppression (Willuweit, 2020), a point recognised by Straubhaar (2015):

[T]he oppressor consciousness tends to transform everything surrounding it into an object of its domination. The earth, property, production, the creations of people, people themselves, time — everything is reduced to the status of objects at its disposal. (p. 58)

The DfE’s objectification occurs through other machine-like, utilitarian vehicles. Elsewhere, for example, Gove (2010a⁶⁶ [2]) likens “no excuses” schools to White saviour ‘crucibles of innovation’, ‘educational lifeboats’ and ‘tugboats adding extra pull to the drive to increase universal standards’. In the political spectacle of “no

⁶⁵ ‘Michael Gove to the National College Annual Conference, Birmingham’ (Speech, 25 November 2010)

⁶⁶ Michael Gove to the National College Annual Conference, Birmingham (Speech, 25 November 2010)

excuses”, the DfE objectifies students to construct their privileged identities as noble-minded Whites (White, 2015). They simultaneously elide student agency and their own role in the inequitable conditions that make possible discourses of toughness and benevolence. In this way, White saviour discourses function to serve White saviourism through misrecognition.

Compounding this is DfE’s presentation of their apparent benevolence as a moral prerogative. The DfE content is littered with terms such as ‘moral purpose’ and ‘social justice’ (see Table 5.2) that not only objectify pupils but also the policy actors’ actions: toughness and benevolence are necessary instruments for an agentless, impersonal morality. And just as morality can confer emotions of resentment through the ‘moral authority’ metaphor of Lakoff’s (2002) ‘strict father morality’, benevolence confers the emotion of ‘compassion’ (p. 96), which literally translates from Latin as ‘with’ and ‘suffering’, or suffering with another (Kundera, 2020). We can see the entailments of this metaphor in action in the DfE examples, above: the ‘lifeboats’ and ‘engines of social mobility’ represent a compassionate response to the limits Lakoff argues the strict father morality imposes on its morality of self-interest (p. 96). Thus, these morality discourses also concur with Cole’s (2012) characterisation of White saviourism as a ‘big emotional response’.

Table 5.2: *Examples of ‘morality’ discourses in the DfE’s “no excuses” content.*

Gove [2] ⁶⁷	Harold Wilson once said of the Labour Party, it is a moral crusade or it is nothing . Well, whatever view one takes of the Labour Party’s history, I believe that we have to ensure there is a driving, crusading, vision at the heart of our Government’s education policy. Or we will forfeit our mandate.
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⁶⁷ ‘Michael Gove to the National College Annual Conference, Birmingham’ (Speech, 25 November 2010)

	Unless we are guided by moral purpose in this coalition government then we will squander the goodwill the British people have, so generously, shown us. [...] We are clearly, as a nation, still wasting talent on a scale which is scandalous. It is a moral failure, an affront against social justice which we have to put right. [...] This policy is driven, like all our education policy, by our guiding moral purpose - the need to raise attainment for all children and close the gap between the richest and poorest.
Wilshaw [6] ⁶⁸	Almost all Headteachers share the belief that it's their moral purpose to do all they can to close the gap in educational outcomes between the richest and the poorest.
Gove [7] ⁶⁹	Heads, teachers, governing bodies, showed more commitment, more devotion, and a greater sense of moral purpose than the critics gave them credit for. Academies are not islands unto themselves; instead, what we've witnessed is an outpouring of desire to help others.
Gove [8] ⁷⁰	But there's a special reason I mention these magnificent seven today. And it goes to the heart of the moral purpose of this Government. [...] Because I know how offensive that is to the people in this room - how belittling of their talent, how dismissive of their ambition, how ignorant of the moral purpose which drives you to all work so hard.
Morgan [13] ⁷¹	This combination of moral purpose and business acumen led to the creation of a school [the "no excuses" Mossbourne Community Academy] which would combat the low expectations, poor behaviour and dumbing down that had so long been synonymous with inner-city schools.

The DfE's White saviourism echoes what others have found in the literature. White saviourism is a core theme in "no excuses" schools: "no excuses" organisations wear their White saviourism with pride (Elliott, 2018; Rauschenberger, 2020) and foundational texts such as 'Sweating the Small Stuff' (Whitman, 2008) and 'No Excuses: Closing The Racial Gap In Learning' (Thernstrom and Thernstrom, 2004) promote the need for educators to save racialised students from academic mediocrity. Indeed, "no excuses" schools' hiring practices privilege White saviour perspectives (Sondel, Kretchmar and Dunn, 2019; Golann, 2021) and teacher training organisations — especially those

⁶⁸ 'High expectation, no excuses' (Press release, 9 February 2012)

⁶⁹ 'Michael Gove speech on academies' (Speech, 11 January 2012)

⁷⁰ 'Education Secretary Michael Gove's speech to ASCL' (Speech, 26 March 2012)

⁷¹ 'Nicky Morgan: a world-class education system for every child' (Speech, 24 February 2016)

oriented towards “no excuses” such as Teach First and Teach for America — are saturated with White saviourism (Lensmire and Snaza, 2010; Elliott, 2018; Ponnock, Torsney and Lombardi, 2018; Rauschenberger, 2020). In short, the DfE’s White saviourism is indicative of the White saviourism that pervades education policymaking as a whole.

Beyond big emotional experiences, what is the function of the brutality and charity of Cole’s (2012) White Saviour Industrial Complex that is exhibited in the DfE’s texts? As the metaphor suggests, the brutality sets the conditions for “no excuses” and its evangelicalism. Toughness, charisma and maverick tendencies are part of what Du Mez (2020) calls muscular Christianity — a dominant trope in US evangelicalism. For Du Mez, John Wayne is the archetype of this movement and its prized characteristics; his patriarchal tendencies appeal to what Apple considers the evangelical conservative ideal, which is concerned with identifying and addressing moral decay with fervorous expediency and abandon (Apple, 2006; Du Mez, 2020).

The DfE’s tough, maverick White saviourism aligns almost perfectly with this trope. Indeed, Gove’s ‘magnificent seven’ draws on the same Hollywood Western heroism Wayne embodies and “no excuses” is the real-world sound stage for this battle against the moral decay of ‘[f]utures are being blighted’ (Gove⁷² [7]), ‘chronic, ingrained educational failure’ (Gove⁷³ [7]) and the ‘politics of despair and

⁷² ‘Michael Gove speech on academies’ (Speech, 11 January 2012)

⁷³ ‘Michael Gove speech on academies’ (Speech, 11 January 2012)

fatalism’ (Wilshaw⁷⁴ [10]). If Whiteness is a dramatic performance (Gillborn, 2005), then “no excuses” is a key part of the conservative education script.

However, while Du Mez’s (2020) and Apple’s (1999) characterisations of evangelical conservatism — in addition to Lakoff’s (2002) ‘strict father morality’ — describe US tendencies, these do not necessarily recontextualise fully to England: just as policies ‘mutate and morph during their journeys’, so we might expect their assumptions and policy warrants to similarly change (Peck and Theodore, 2010, p. 170). The heavy adoption of benevolent and moralistic discourses in the DfE’s “no excuses” texts represents an overt counterbalancing of the brutal toward more colonial, missionary identity in England — a point we will explore in detail later in this chapter. Just as ‘urban’ discourses function as a dog whistle to the White hegemonic alliance (Allen, 2009), oxymorons such as ‘tough love’ (Gibb⁷⁵, 2016a [12]) speak to these oppositional dispositions. The DfE’s rhetorical engagement of Cole’s (2012) brutal policies ‘in the morning’ and charity ‘in the afternoon’ thus functions to tailor White saviourism’s ‘big emotional experience’ to its audiences (RQ3). We will return to the proselytising nature of this dog whistling later in this chapter.

The use of a racialised voice might also serve this end: while the “no excuses” texts’ authors are all White, they also draw on Bell’s (1992) ‘Rules of Racial Standing’. In these rules, Bell outlines who can speak about race and who is listened to. The DfE’s maverick and tough discourses put them into the

⁷⁴ ‘SCHOOLS NorthEast Summit 2015’ (Speech, 15 October 2015)

⁷⁵ ‘Nick Gibb: the importance of school leadership’ (Speech, 26 January 2016)

‘exceptional white person’ category (Thompson, 2008, p. 329). The use of Katherine Birbalsingh’s voice, however, mobilises Bell’s (1992) third rule of racial standing, where a ‘black person who publicly disparages or criticises other blacks who are speaking or acting in ways that upset whites’ is ‘granted “enhanced standing”’ (p. 109). Nick Gibb refers to her directly, in multiple (see Gibb 2016 [12]⁷⁶ and [14]⁷⁷). As self-styled ‘Britain’s Strictest Headmistress’ (see Figure 5.4), and with a strong media and political presence (Butler, 2023), Birbalsingh’s voice amplifies and affords credibility to the DfE’s discourses with her ‘enhanced standing’ (Bell, 1992, p. 109). However, by using it, the DfE also mobilise the most insidious knowledge that it is all but impossible to challenge her racialised discourses (Bell, 1992). Drawing on Birbalsingh’s support thus functions to validate “no excuses” emotionally and to blur further the lines connecting the DfE to accusations of racism (RQ3).

Figure 5.4: The Twitter profile page of Britain’s Strictest Headteacher, Katherine Birbalsingh, as of 8th November 2023.



⁷⁶ ‘Nick Gibb: the importance of school leadership’ (Speech, 26 January 2016)

⁷⁷ ‘Nick Gibb: the role of leadership in school improvement’ (Speech, 9 May 2016)

5.4.4 Awards in the evening: the emotional experience of “no excuses”

The last phase of Cole’s (2012) metaphor is where White saviours enjoy ‘awards in the evening’ (p. 1). The DfE content is littered with “no excuses” praise and sentimentality, with the obsequious modifier ‘magnificent’ in Gove’s⁷⁸ [8] ‘magnificent seven’ being a prime example. In the extract, he says, ‘[e]very single one of them [the seven] proves — every single day of their lives — that deprivation need not be destiny.’

Unlike the anonymous ‘enemies of promise’ (Gove⁷⁹, 2012a [7]), the DfE are far less reticent in praising individuals and their schools. This is illustrated in the references to Birbalsingh’s and other “no excuses” actors such as Max Heimendorf — mentioned three times — and individual teachers Bruno Reddy (Gibb⁸⁰, 2016a [12]), Joe Kirby and Katie Ashford (Gibb⁸¹, 2016b [14]). “No excuses” institutions are referred to far more regularly: King Solomon Academy has six mentions, Mossbourne Academy four, and Michaela two. In total, the DfE refer to specific individuals, schools and MATs in eight texts, and when specific actors are referred to, they are afforded rhapsodic praise. Gibb [12], for example, calls Bruno Reddy ‘inspirational’⁸² while effusing about Birbalsingh’s ‘admirable

⁷⁸ ‘Education Secretary Michael Gove’s speech to ASCL’ (Speech, 26 March 2012)

⁷⁹ ‘Michael Gove speech on academies’ (Speech, 11 January 2012)

⁸⁰ ‘Nick Gibb: the importance of school leadership’ (Speech, 26 January 2016)

⁸¹ ‘Nick Gibb: the role of leadership in school improvement’ (Speech, 9 May 2016)

⁸² ‘Their **inspirational mathematics teacher Bruno Reddy** ensured that every pupil mastered their number bonds and times tables to the point of instant recall, as a prerequisite for further teaching.

disregard'⁸³ for orthodoxy and King Solomon's 'inconceivable feats'⁸⁴ of achievements 'which would have been branded fanciful'⁸⁵. Elsewhere, Gibb [14] has his 'hand on heart'⁸⁶, and Wilshaw [10] starts 'by paying heartfelt tribute'⁸⁷ in their unctuous praise, and Gove [8] rhapsodises about 'the best generation [...] ever' of 'young teachers' and 'heads'.

In many of these examples, words such as 'heart' (e.g. Wilshaw [10]; Gibb [14]) speak directly to the discourses of morality and sentimentality uttered elsewhere and also Cole's (2012) 'big emotional experience' (p. 2). However, while direct praise of individuals in the texts is common, details of their praiseworthy feats are far rarer. Gibb's [12] reference to King Solomon's GCSE achievements is the most tangible example. Beyond that, the praiseworthy acts are mainly absent. For instance, we are told that Reddy is 'inspirational' (Gibb [12]), but the reason — that his children can instantly recall 'number bonds and times tables' — feels far less inspirational. And beyond examples of Birbalsingh's 'admirable disregard' for educational orthodoxy (albeit that these examples appear very orthodox as explored earlier), we are told we 'must reserve judgement until the school's first set of GCSE results in 3 years' time', advice that Gibb himself does not heed in his own immediate favourable judgement (Gibb [12]). What makes these people

⁸³ 'She is currently running a free school in Wembley which shows an **admirable disregard** for the way in which English schools are normally operated.'

⁸⁴ 'As our free school and academy reforms mature, I am certain that we will see more and more brave and free-thinking school leaders, such as Max, whose pupils achieve previously **inconceivable feats** under their charge.'

⁸⁵ 'Yet at this school, **King Solomon Academy**, 95% of pupils gained 5 good GCSEs in 2015, and 77% of pupils passed the EBacc, **an achievement which would have been branded fanciful** at the time of their opening in 2009.'

⁸⁶ '... I can say, **hand on heart**, that the very best part of my job is when I'm able to leave Westminster and Whitehall, to see beyond the headlines, the statistics and the speeches, and to witness first-hand the fantastic work that you're doing to change young lives in schools right across the country.'

⁸⁷ 'I'd like to start by **paying heartfelt tribute** to you as leaders of our education system. Whether you are running a local authority school, a free school or an academy, you're the ones firmly in the driving seat, leading change and influencing education policy in a way that's never happened before.'

praiseworthy in the DfE's content is not any palpably outstanding achievement but that they work in "no excuses" schools and thus fit with the DfE's educational policy agenda.

The duplicities in praise of these White saviours evoke the kind of performative wokeness and doublespeak designed into other educational policies (Ahmed, 2006; Hess, 2013; 2022; Smith, 2023). While they validate white privilege, they also function as a smokescreen for the conditions that buttress this privilege (Brown, 2013; Hess, 2013; 2022; Sonnel, Kretchmar and Dunn, 2019; Aviles, 2023). Between the discourses of benevolence and morality in this and the previous sections, White saviourism fits into the 'I just want to help' performative tool of Whiteness (Picower, 2009, p. 209).

In response to RQ1 and RQ3, then, ***the public rhetoric of sentimentality and congratulation surrounding "no excuses" functions to validate the emotions of its White proponents; they can bask in the privilege of self-congratulation and distance themselves from the systemic failures that have made such a policy possible. Through "no excuses", the DfE can simultaneously be tough and maverick, benevolent and moral, praiseworthy and effective, all while promoting a racially harmful policy.***

5.5 “No excuses” as a missionary endeavour

So far, I have argued that through “no excuses”, the DfE position themselves as White saviours and that this serves to obfuscate a racial reality and ‘present those in power as caring about racial equity (even where this is not the result)’ (Bradbury, 2020, p. 247). One of the problems with focusing on how Whiteness operates to privilege itself is that in doing so, we privilege the White perspective over perspectives that foreground racialised harm (Leonardo, 2004). Thus, in this section, I will unpack how “no excuses” discourses function within broader patterns of neo-conservatism and racialised pathology (RQ3). In doing so, I make the case that “no excuses” discourses constitute the policy as a missionary endeavour.

What is meant by a missionary endeavour? At its heart, White saviourism is concerned with a religious saviour mentality, which Vera and Gordon (2003) characterise through a White Messiah metaphor. While iconic figures such as Mother Theresa personify the missionary nature of White saviourism (Bandyopadhyay, 2019), White saviourism is still associated with quasi-Christian values of missionary service and the missionary character of international development (Bandyopadhyay, 2019; Hinsliff, 2019; Anderson, Knee and Mowatt, 2021). Similarly, education is steeped in missionary tropes (Sailor, 1931; Pearce, 1988; Farooq, 2014; Ayele, 2017) and near-ubiquitous mission discourses such as the mission statements espoused by leaders and organisations (Stemler, Bebell and Sonnabend, 2011; Alegre *et al*, 2018; Allen *et al*, 2018; Coker, 2022).

The DfE content is no exception, although it is only referred to directly once. In Nicky Morgan's⁸⁸ [13] 2016 speech to education and business leaders, she refers to a 'national mission' and a 'clear mission and purpose'. The latter is the most interesting: it immediately precedes the kind of White saviour praise we saw in the previous section. This praise for Clive Bourne, founder of Mossbourne Community Academy, outlined his mission to 'combat the low expectations, poor behaviour and dumbing down that had so long been synonymous with inner-city schools'. As we have already established, the choice to use 'inner-city' is racially coded. Thus, Morgan's example offers us a perfect example of the racial framing of the "no excuses" mission. While there are other, tacit missionary discourses in the DfE content (explored in more detail in subsequent sections), Morgan's construction draws on historical educational tropes. I have already argued how "no excuses" might be considered a form of internal colonisation and racialised geographical patterning — an issue we will return to later in this chapter — but religion and education have long been drivers and tools of colonialism. In the 19th and 20th centuries, for example, the US government educated Native Americans so they might read the bible (Brown, 2013), and in the 18th and 19th centuries, education was a core part of the UK's missionary linguistic project (Cushing, 2022).

Missionary colonialism still drives educational policy and practice, with Offutt-Chaney (2019) arguing that 'racial control over education' is instrumental to

⁸⁸ 'Nicky Morgan: a world-class education system for every child' (Speech, 24 February 2016)

‘colonial governmentality’ (p. 6). Within “no excuses”, specifically, teachers are ‘constructed as [...] neocolonial missionaries whose job is to save poor, ‘urban’ children’ (Cushing, 2021, p. 27) and Kulz (2013) observed that Mossbourne Community Academy and its leader, Sir Michael Wilshaw, assumed a ‘missionary’ stance (p. 48). From Morgan’s discourses alone, we can see this colonial missionary character in the DfE’s “no excuses” rhetoric. However, while the mission is not directly referenced elsewhere, the DfE authors saturate their content with discourses that invoke a missionary character.

5.5.1 Proselytising with “no excuses”

However, Morgan’s discourses diverge from the “no excuses” missionary perspectives in the previous section by assuming a proselytising, crusading character. In the passage referring to the “no excuses” mission, she directly courts her audience to become involved, using phrases such as ‘you can play’ and ‘we need more of you’ [13]⁸⁹. This proselytising is evident in both the recruiting imperative undercurrent and religious fervour found elsewhere in the content. Words and phrases such as ‘rejoice’⁹⁰ (Gove [12]), ‘reborn’⁹¹ (Gibb [11]), ‘human spirit ennobled and fulfilled’ (Gove [2]⁹²), and ‘called to lead’ strongly denote religious discourses with a largely Christian character. These religious

⁸⁹ **‘You can play an important role** in shaping, leading and focusing our schools and colleges, and in helping young people to enter the world of work with the knowledge, skills and character traits that allow them to prosper.

I know that many of you here today are already involved and I can’t thank you enough - but **we need more of you and your friends and colleagues to come forward.**’

⁹⁰ ‘You want them to be pushed, nudged, cajoled, encouraged, tempted and inspired to do more than they ever thought possible. **And you want them to rejoice** in knowing they have achieved their full potential.’

⁹¹ ‘The idea of school autonomy was of course **reborn** with the first city academies created by Lord Adonis in 2002, and by 2010 there were 203 academies in England.’

⁹² ‘And that is what I want too. In the relentless drive to help every child achieve everything of which they are capable there can be neither rest nor tranquillity. But there can be the endless satisfaction of **seeing the human spirit ennobled and fulfilled. That is the task you have been called to lead.** And it is my job to serve you.’

allusions are consistent with the evangelical conservatism introduced earlier, where Christianity is a crucial policymaking resource (Apple, 2006). According to Apple (2006):

[T]he separation of public and private is largely rejected by the Christian right. What many people would consider the most private of all matters — one's religious and moral beliefs — are instead viewed as crucial resources for the moral reformation and "healing" of a society as a whole. How could anyone be against such selfless healing? In this way, part of its restorational project is to restore the public role and authority of evangelical beliefs, values, and morality in order to help everyone clean up the mess that should be visible to everyone in the nation. (p. 160)

Of the DfE content's authors, all but Nick Gibb profess their Christianity openly: Nicky Morgan labels herself as 'a Christian Secretary of State for Education' who will 'oppose secular, politically correct dogma' (Gimson, 2014); Wilshaw refers to his 'duty, both as a teacher and a Christian, to do the best for [young people from disadvantaged backgrounds] and to get the best out of them' (Harris, 2016); Gove boasts of his faith impacting his policies (Brown, 2015; Gove, 2015; Farley, 2016) and sending every school a King James Bible (Hughes, 2012). They all exude evangelical conservative ideals (Apple, 2006), so it is unsurprising to see them draw on religious discourses in their policymaking and to see the Christianity of their White saviourism. Despite Apple's (2006) characterisation of evangelical conservatism being based on values and practices arguably distinct to the US,

the trend has been noted empirically in the UK, with former Prime Minister (contemporaneous with the eligible DfE texts' authors) David Cameron's self-avowed personal conservative evangelism — which Allen (2018) labels provocatively 'doing God' — feeding into racist 'cultural markers of difference to demarcate "them" from "us"' through conceptualisations of the UK as a 'Christian country' (p. 12). The DfE's "no excuses" discourses, therefore, sell their (racialising) faith as they sell their (racialising) policies; when they sell both, they sell to those they proselytise to, but they also sell themselves the veneer of benevolent selflessness.

The quasi-religious proselytising extends to testimonial expressions of other "no excuses' actors and their feats. We have already seen how the DfE draws on the White saviourism of policy actors like Max Heimendorf, Michael Wilshaw and Katherine Birbalsingh. The "no excuses" content invites us to 'witness' an 'outpouring of desire to help others' (Gove [7]⁹³) and we are 'called to lead' (Gove [2]⁹⁴). We are encouraged to marvel at the virtues of performing 'previously inconceivable feats' (Gibb [12]⁹⁵) and of leaders leaving a 'high-paying profession [...] to become a head' (Gove [8]⁹⁶). And after 'confessing to ambition' and wanting children to 'be pushed, nudged, cajoled, encouraged, tempted and inspired to do more than they ever thought possible', 'you want them to rejoice in knowing they

⁹³ 'Heads, teachers, governing bodies, showed more commitment, more devotion, and a greater sense of moral purpose than the critics gave them credit for. Academies are not islands unto themselves; instead, **what we've witnessed is an outpouring of desire to help others.**'

⁹⁴ 'In the relentless drive to help every child achieve everything of which they are capable there can be neither rest nor tranquillity. But there can be the endless satisfaction of seeing the human spirit ennobled and fulfilled. **That is the task you have been called to lead.** And it is my job to serve you.'

⁹⁵ 'As our free school and academy reforms mature, I am certain that we will see more and more brave and free-thinking school leaders, such as Max, **whose pupils achieve previously inconceivable feats under their charge.**'

⁹⁶ 'Education Secretary Michael Gove's speech to ASCL' (Speech, 26 March 2012)

have achieved their full potential' (Gove [2]⁹⁷). These discourses would not be out of place in church service testimonials and illustrate the religious catharsis of “no excuses” White saviourism. Just as the maverick but benevolent Magnificent Seven attained salvation by aiding the objectified Mexican villagers (Alexander, 2021), Gove’s ‘magnificent seven’ and the texts’ other paragons of evangelical conservative virtues attain their salvation through “no excuses”. Presenting “no excuses” proselytes in this way depicts them as exceptional White people, a category we have already established (in section 5.4.3) is problematic for the way it privileges Whiteness and White experience (Thompson, 2008). Their actions, as we will explore in the next section, also offer the means for proselytes to emulate “no excuses” White saviourism.

5.5.2 Artefacts of evangelical conservatism in “no excuses”

We have already explored how children are objectified through “no excuses” (for example, see section 5.4.3). Through CPA perspectives, we know that racialised populations are often constituted as problems (Apple, 1999; 2006; Bradbury, 2020) and that education is a key site for overcoming perceived moral decay (Apple, 2006). Indeed, Apple (2006) describes the evangelical conservative position that ‘only by recentring issues of authority, morality, family, church, and “decency” can schools overcome the “moral decay” so evident all around us’ (p. 46). These themes are evident in the discourses that surround “no excuses” (RQ1), and they function as testimonial artefacts (RQ3). The most striking example of this is Gibb’s⁹⁸ [11] family table testimonial:

⁹⁷ ‘Michael Gove to the National College Annual Conference’, Birmingham’ (Speech, 25 November 2010)

⁹⁸ ‘Nick Gibb: how autonomy raises standards’ (Speech, 12 November 2015)

What this school has achieved is remarkable, and offers a challenge to every school in England to reimagine what is possible for their pupils. [...]

The head of King Solomon Academy introduced a rather unusual idea into his lunch hall when the school was founded in 2009: family dining. Pupils sit at small tables, and each pupil is assigned a role of serving out the food, setting the table, clearing the table, and so on. It has been an enormous success, and is being widely copied by other schools. Earlier this year I had lunch with a group of year 7 pupils at a new free school in Wembley, where behaviour and manners were far in advance of what you would expect in most smart restaurants.

The family table is a common metaphor and noted in Brown's (2013) study where "no excuses" teachers boast of playing 'the role of "family around the dinner table" for its urban, college-bound students' (p. 124). It is a powerful symbol of teachers' and schools' desire to bring order to perceived chaotic lives that lack 'proper structure' (Ladson-Billings, 2017, p. 82). Gibb draws on precisely these tropes: family dining exemplifies Gibb's conservative ideals to bring a 'traditional, academic, disciplined, "no excuses" approach'⁹⁹ to domesticate the perceived chaotic lives of urban children. This is brought into sharp contrast by the extracts' juxtaposition of 'behaviour, manners, smart dining' with 'one of the most

⁹⁹ 'At root, it is not autonomy that really matters, it is what autonomy allows you to do differently that counts. The real genius of school autonomy is that when 1,000 flowers bloom, we are able, given time, to see which flowers bloom brightest. Current research points in the same direction - it is **the traditional, academic, disciplined, 'no excuses' approach** to education that will truly allow pupils to fulfil their potential.'

disadvantaged boroughs of London for child poverty'; these activate the cognitive frames of a typically conservative patriarchal battle with the deficit notions of poverty and race (Lakoff, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2017).

Thus, the family table becomes an artefact of “no excuses” White saviourism. Gibb offers it as a testimonial experience to his proselytes; it is a tangible action they can coalesce their deficit-laden perceptions around and an act they can palpably emulate. Indeed, the family table is significant in the conservative ‘strict father morality’ metaphor we explored in 5.4.2 and 5.4.3 (Lakoff, 2002; Wilk, 2010). Gibb, therefore, presents a mission, artefact of the mission and population to objectify in the domestication of chaotic lives, family table and disadvantaged children, respectively. Through this presentation, the mission rhetoric becomes an available reality — ‘widely copied by other schools’ — for would-be “no excuses” White saviours.

5.5.3 Proselytising for expansion

While the family table represents a means by which “no excuses” can be expanded by potential White saviours, it is only one example illustrating the DfE’s expansionist ideals. Proselytising — ‘[t]o convert or attempt to convert from one opinion, religion, or party, etc., to another’ (OED, 2023) — is expansionist by nature. It is an essential part of the colonial missionary desire to civilise racialised populations (Johnston, 2003; Mignolo, 2012) and also an obligatory part of religious membership in many faiths, such as Christianity and Mormonism (Stene, 2016; Halford and O’Brien, 2020).

We have already examined how “no excuses” aligns with the domesticating, civilising evangelical conservative position. For the rhetoric to become a much wider reality, “no excuses” requires expanding. The DfE’s content is littered with evidence of this desire (see Appendix 7), as illustrated by Gibb in these examples:

King Solomon Academy is now able to spread its means of success to the 34 other schools within its multi-academy trust, Ark Schools. Unsurprisingly, school leaders are clammering at the doors to visit King Solomon Academy.

(Gibb [12]¹⁰⁰)

This government’s reforms have been the most radical and far reaching since the 1944 Butler Act [...]. That’s why, on occasion, they attract controversy. Our reforms are designed to deliver more schools like King Solomon; non-selective schools achieving GCSE results that exceed those of many selective independent schools.

(Gibb [14]¹⁰¹)

Again, testimony is heavily featured in this proselytising. Within policy networks, transnational policies are courted and adopted through perceptions of success and their worldview assumptions (Peck and Theodore, 2010; Ball, 2016). Gibb’s

¹⁰⁰ ‘Nick Gibb: the importance of school leadership’ (Speech, 26 January 2016)

¹⁰¹ ‘Nick Gibb: the role of leadership in school improvement’ (Speech, 9 May 2016)

testimonial reference to school leaders ‘clammering at the doors to visit King Solomon Academy’ speaks directly to this. Elsewhere, Gibb¹⁰² [12] expresses delight at heads who ‘make a clean break with the current orthodoxies [and] plough their own furrow’¹⁰³. While we cannot be sure of the intent of these relatively common phrases, the allusions are unmistakeably religious — ‘plough their own furrow’ derives from The Old Testament, Hosea 10:12¹⁰⁴, for example — and align with notions of evangelical conservatism (Apple, 2006; Allen, 2017). In this way, they speak to conservative perceptions of righteousness — ‘doing God’ (Allen, 2017) — and the ‘big emotional experience’ of White saviourism (Cole, 2012, p. 2); phrases such as ‘clammering at the doors’ and ‘being widely copied by other schools’ (as explored in the previous section) frame these as testimonies to emulate and expand with.

The DfE also talk directly to the leaders they court. For example, Morgan¹⁰⁵ [13] states: ‘I am asking you to come forward and play a role in the renewal of England’s education system’. In a market of policies, individual policies need to be marketed to be noticed and adopted (Apple, 2006). Thus, we should not be surprised by Morgan and others directly and indirectly marketing “no excuses”. The White saviour and proselytising rhetoric described in this study is readily consumed and acted upon by philanthropists (Sondel, 2016; Allbright *et al*, 2023) but also by teachers, leaders and educational organisations.

¹⁰² ‘Nick Gibb: the importance of school leadership’ (Speech, 26 January 2016)

¹⁰³ “In particular, I have been deeply impressed by those heads who have grasped the opportunities offered by today’s era of school autonomy to make a clean break with the current orthodoxies of how schools should be run, and plough their own furrow.”

¹⁰⁴ Hosea 10:12, ‘Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you’ (King James Bible, 1769)

¹⁰⁵ Nicky Morgan (Speech, 24 February 2016)

The latter have huge scope for policy influence and teacher recruitment, such as Teach for America and Teach First (Kretchmar, Sondel and Ferrare, 2014; Elliot, 2018). Indeed, Teach First is directly referred to in two of the fourteen DfE “no excuses” texts (Gibb [14]) another example of the DfE’s testimonial proselytising. Prominent UK policymakers and leaders also adopt the DfE’s proselytising missionary discourses. For example, Birbalsingh’s (2016) ‘Battle Hymn of the Tiger Teachers’ directly states its desire for Michaela to change the world. Also, in the endorsement quotations, Christine Counsell — an influential academic that worked with the DfE (Cambridge University, 2023) — calls Michaela ‘emancipatory’ (Birbalsingh, 2016, p. 4) and Stephen Tierney — a former MAT CEO who worked with the policy-influencing Heads’ Roundtable (Tierney, 2023) — exalts Michaela’s ‘missionary zeal’ (Birbalsingh, 2016, p. 5).

We have already established that “no excuses” growth and establishment in England are racialised in terms of its racial discourses (RQ1), geographical expression (RQ2) and racial harm (Chapter Two). Through the expansionist, proselytising discourses explored in this section, we see further glimpses of this geographical racialisation as a missionary endeavour, which we will explore in the next section. Michaela’s desire to change the world speaks directly to this. In Chapter Two, we saw that space is a technology of power (Yazdih, 2022). The proselytising and testimonial qualities of the DfE’s texts speak to their desire to expand “no excuses”, and this is built on the bedrock of a policy which the DfE have intentionally recontextualised and rationalised (see Chapter Four, section 4.4.3.a). “No excuses” requires a physical location for it to carry out its effects,

positive and negative, intentional or tacit (see Chapter Four, section 4.5 for examples of these effects). ***Thus, the DfE's desire for expansion has a spatial, geographical dimension*** (RQ2). ***The proselytising character of the DfE's "no excuses" discourse matters because it plays an important mediating role in legitimising and spreading this harmful policy. Not only does the proselytising character appeal to a quasi-religious morality and thus expand the model, but it also obscures "no excuses" racial harms and the DfE's role in promoting them*** (RQ3). In professing a desire to expand this model in such a way, the DfE tacitly support White supremacy (Gillborn, 2005).

5.5.4 "No excuses" as missionary medicine

Earlier, we explored the testimonial artefact of family dining, which offers a direct, palpable action for conservative evangelicals to orient their practice. In the previous section, we also introduced the idea of positions that the proselytising might convert from — including strawman *orthodoxies* and *dogma* — and to. However, the DfE also deploys salient medical discourses to symbolise problems and solutions to convert from and to, albeit relatively infrequently.

In constituting the policy problem, the DfE characterises its moral decay as pathologies. Gove, for example, refers to being 'the sick man of Europe when it comes to social mobility'¹⁰⁶ [2] and how '[f]utures are being blighted' [by] chronic,

¹⁰⁶ 'We have to overcome the deep, historically entrenched, factors which keep so many in poverty, which deprive so many of the chance to shape their own destiny, which have made us the **sick man of Europe when it comes to social mobility**...We are clearly, as a nation, still wasting talent on a scale which is scandalous.'

ingrained educational failure'¹⁰⁷ [7]. The DfE also pathologises previous regimes' policies, which align with the strawman orthodoxies and dogma. Gove [2] expresses his desire to 'prune the curriculum of over-prescriptive notions'¹⁰⁸, and Gibb [14] bemoans 'initiativeitis', 'a constant turnover of clever wheezes' and how the former Department for Children, Schools and Families 'had become addicted to meddling'¹⁰⁹.

By reifying a sense of pathology, the DfE affords itself the opportunity to administer medicalised discourses in the "no excuses" mission. Gove [8] says, for example: 'I welcome the *injection* of new thinking'¹¹⁰, and Gibb [11] describes how '20 state schools in Houston were chosen to have No Excuses methods *injected* into them in a randomised trial'¹¹¹. In other examples, Gibb welcomes changes to school structures and recommends that 'inspiring school leadership may be the *midwives* of such a change'¹¹² [11], presenting 'measures which, in time, could all but *eradicate* illiteracy and innumeracy'¹¹³ [14].

¹⁰⁷ **'Futures are being blighted.** Horizons are being limited. Generations of children are being let down. And yet the response of those 'campaigners' to an attempt to rescue the situation is 'hands off.' 'Hands off the **chronic, ingrained educational failure.**'

¹⁰⁸ **'I want to prune the curriculum of over-prescriptive notions** of how to teach and how to timetable.'

¹⁰⁹ 'When I first became Schools Minister in 2010, it was clear that - whilst power had passed from local authorities to schools - the Department for Children, Schools and Families as it was then known, had **become addicted to meddling** in the minutia of school administration.'

Schools had gone through a period of 'initiativeitis', with a **constant turnover of 'clever wheezes'** emerging from the department, or one of its ever-growing panoply of quangos.'

¹¹⁰ 'It's why I **welcome the injection of new thinking** which has come into communities where under-performance has been entrenched as more and more academies - many represented in this hall - open their own free schools, sponsor existing schools and enter new partnerships and federations.'

¹¹¹ 'In 2014, **20 state schools in Houston were chosen to have No Excuses methods injected into them in a randomised trial.** The result was an improvement in mathematics in both elementary and secondary schools, showing that these effective charter school methods can translate from one context to another.'

¹¹² 'At root, the one change that will drive up educational standards in this country is improved teaching methods. Changes to school structures and inspiring **school leadership may be the midwives of such a change**, but it is the fundamental interaction of what is happening in the classroom, between teacher and pupil, day in and day out, which will transform their potential to succeed.'

¹¹³ 'Of course, there are still too many failing schools with weak leadership in this country... We have invested heavily in the use of phonics in primary schools, and in an innovative scheme to the mastery method of mathematics teaching from Shanghai and Singapore to English schools; **2 measures which, in time, could all but eradicate illiteracy and innumeracy.**'

These medicalised discourses are consistent with those described in the literature. The expansion of medical frames to manage problems that were not considered medical is a growing phenomenon (Conrad, 1992). In education literature, it has been observed as trauma-informed practice's White saviourism (Goldin, Duane and Khasnabis, 2022), school turnaround as shock therapy (Johnson, 2013) and medicalised labelling within "no excuses" schools (Ramey 2015; Marsh, 2018).

It also aligns with teachers' framing of their students of colour as problems, which places the issue in the students' bodies themselves (Vaught and Castagno, 2008; Picower, 2009; Aggarwal, 2016). Similarly to the DfE's "no excuses" framing, they also see themselves as the solution (Allbright *et al*, 2023). However, the DfE does not present the students themselves as pathological. Rather, they talk of a generalised pathology that pervades education at a systems level. While this enables them to remove themselves from accusations of racism, the fact that "no excuses" has such a racialised geographical expression means that the medicalised framing affects the bodies of individual students of colour (Morris, 2005; Skiba, Arredondo and Williams, 2014; Offutt-Chaney, 2019; James-Gallaway, 2022; Marsh and Walker, 2022; Sevon, 2022; Cushing, 2023b; Skiba, Fergus and Gregory, 2023).

While the examples of medicalisation in this section are relatively infrequent, they are salient by their paradigmatic — in a semiotic sense (Chandler, 2017) —

position in the texts where other, less medicalised terminology would suffice. For example, Gove's welcome of 'the *injection* of new thinking' could simply be a 'welcome of new thinking', and Gibb's 'no excuses methods *injected* into them' could simply be 'implemented'. That notwithstanding, the medicalised discourses mark and accord with the DfE's missionary characterisation of "no excuses". Medicine has long been part of the missionary, White saviour endeavour (Agarwal *et al*, 2020; Büyüm *et al*, 2020; Banerjee *et al*, 2023; Kimani, 2023); Mother Theresa and Florence Nightingale are prime examples (Coakley, 1990; Bandyopadhyay, 2019). The DfE's adoption of medicalised discourses — albeit infrequent — places "no excuses" within this long tradition.

5.5.5 Crusading with "no excuses"

So far, I have made the case that the "no excuses" White saviour discourses function threefold (RQ3): first, they serve as a 'big emotional experience' (Cole, 2012, p. 2) while obscuring the harmful racial reality of "no excuses"; second, they constitute "no excuses" as a quasi-religious, missionary endeavour; third, they proselytise, assimilating young people into "no excuses" discipline and recruiting new White saviours for the model's expansion. However, as I will argue in this section, these White saviour discourses also function as a clarion call to an evangelical conservative crusade.

The DfE content is littered with crusading discourses. Gove [2] uses the word directly in his insistence that 'there is a driving, *crusading*, vision at the heart of

our Government's education policy'¹¹⁴ and in his endorsement of Harold Wilson's description of the Labour Party 'as a moral crusade or it is nothing'. Elsewhere, he regularly opts for combative language to, for example, '*defeat* [...] ideologues' [7], be 'an *enemy* of all the forces of social stagnation'¹¹⁵ [8], and deal with any '*attack*' or '*onslaught*'¹¹⁶ with the aid of his '*allies*' [8]. Unsurprisingly, Gove draws on quasi-religious crusading discourses most often: recall that he proudly admits his Christianity influences his politics (Brown, 2015; Gove, 2015; Farley, 2016); he also made the arresting allusion to the 'magnificent seven'.

This language speaks directly to Cole's (2012, p. 2) 'brutal policies in the morning', but Wilshaw upstages Gove for brutality. Wilshaw casually adopts a medieval torture framing of 'holding the feet of officers and headteachers to the fire'¹¹⁷. And while vague allusions to enemies are not defined — omissions we know the DfE's authors are apt to from our previous analyses — confections of an '*onslaught*' reify the need for '*allies*' (Gove [8]). This is where the magnificent seven allusion resonates most. If the overt reference to crusades, combat and torture does not stir allies' imaginations, the vivid imagery of the 'magnificent seven' will.

¹¹⁴ 'Harold Wilson once said of the Labour Party, it is a **moral crusade** or it is nothing. Well, whatever view one takes of the Labour Party's history, I believe that we have to ensure **there is a driving, crusading, vision at the heart of our Government's education policy**. Or we will forfeit our mandate.'

¹¹⁵ 'I am an **enemy of all the forces of social stagnation**. And there are **no better allies** to have in defeating those forces than all of you. It is to defeating those forces that I know all your amazing hard and tireless work is dedicated - for which I thank you.'

¹¹⁶ 'But the sad truth is that, for some of these critics, the facts don't matter much. And they'll continue to view the spread of autonomy as **an unwelcome onslaught**. They'll continue to talk about the Government 'threatening' schools with academy conversion.'

¹¹⁷ 'Elected leaders like Jules Pipe, the Mayor of Hackney, have been instrumental in raising school standards across London by **holding the feet of officers and headteachers to the fire** and maintaining a clear focus on the achievement of the most disadvantaged pupils.'

The crusading imagery does not stop with the ‘magnificent seven’. While commonly used outside of combative discourse, Gove¹¹⁸ [5] and Gibb¹¹⁹ [11] refer to ‘[t]he appointment of a head of Charlie Taylor’s *calibre*’ and ‘the recruitment of *high-calibre* people’, respectively. If it was not for their regular use of combative, crusading discourses, this might be excused as the use of common terms. These terms take on greater significance in the context of the “no excuses” content, particularly with the ‘magnificent seven’ reference.

This finding aligns with others’ observations of the crusading quality of “no excuses”. Horn (2010) labels “no excuses” teachers as ‘KIPP crusaders’ (p. 89) and notes how “no excuses” proselytes exhibit the ‘near-religious zeal’ (p. 93) associated with ‘well-heeled colonialist missionaries on a crusade to save the souls of indigenous urban poor children by converting them to middle-class values and middle-class mindsets’ (p. 89). These examples exemplify Horn’s observation: Gibb’s family table represents middle-class values and mindsets, while Gove’s crusade and Magnificent Seven discourses represent the ‘zeal [...] to save’ (p. 89). This also fits with wider education patterns such as the ‘armed social work’ (Turner, 2018, p. 765) of the anti-terrorism Prevent policy, and the ‘muscular’ approach of Fundamental British Values’ (Crawford, 2017, p. 2).

¹¹⁸ ‘Improving discipline is a big priority. Teachers can’t teach effectively, and pupils can’t learn if schools can’t keep order. These changes will give teachers confidence that they can remove disruptive pupils and search children where necessary. **The appointment of a head of Charlie Taylor’s calibre shows** how serious we are about dealing with this issue. He has an excellent track record in improving discipline in some of the most challenging schools in the country.’

¹¹⁹ ‘In the current year we have allocated over £1.4 million to the **recruitment of high-calibre people** to govern schools and MATs.’

This study differs from this literature, however, in the way England's "no excuses" missionaries brazenly coopt this language. Not only is the DfE importing the policy from the US, but it is also another embodiment of muscular Christianity (Du Mez, 2020). By doing so, this expression of White supremacy is legitimised by a quasi-religious fervour. Just as John Wayne is emblematic of US muscular Christianity to conservative American ideals (Du Mez, 2020), framing "no excuses" as a crusade speaks to English conservatism. The allusion to the 'magnificent seven' — which aligns very closely with the iconography of Du Mez's John Wayne — also captures the geographical essence of the American frontier as a technology of power (Yazdiha, 2022) that violently objectifies and colonises (see section 5.3). Like my argument in Chapter Four (section 4.5), the frontier the DfE reifies through "no excuses" is a zone of internal colonisation without clear borders and in continual motion. Where the *urban* discourses dog whistle to the White hegemonic alliance (Allen, 2009), the *crusade* discourses offer a blueprint for this racialised, geographical action legitimised by the state. And while the DfE's proselytising betrays their desire to convert and recruit White saviours, the *crusade* discourses betray their desire to mobilise these White saviours into a moral war. The ostensible absence of race from this rhetoric maintains the ingrained, naturalised racism that pervades society (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Gillborn, 2006b). Thus, "no excuses" is a discursive frontier and geographical battleground for White supremacy, a concept we will explore further in the final section.

5.6 Conclusion: “No excuses” as a new missionary frontier

I have made the case the DfE’s “no excuses” discourses function to mobilise White saviours to crusade. However, any crusade requires a location. Drawing on the findings and analyses of Chapter Four, in this section I argue that the racial geographies of “no excuses” spatially constitute urban internal colonies as a racialised battleground.

Gillborn (2006a, p. 334) opens his conclusion to his study of the *Whiteworld* with this quotation by McLaren (1998):

The logics of empire are still with us, bound to the fabric of our daily being-in-the-world; woven into our posture toward others; connected to the muscles of our eyes; dipped in the chemical relations that excite and calm us; structured into the language of our perceptions. We cannot will our racist logics away. We need to work hard to eradicate them. We need to struggle with a formidable resolve in order to overcome that which we are afraid to confirm exists let alone confront in the battleground of our souls. (p. 63)

This quotation reminds us that race is a battleground of constant struggle. Elsewhere in Gillborn’s paper, he argues that White interests mobilise ‘structural and cultural forces to defend white power at the expense of the racialised “Other”

(p. 318) and through McLaren's quotation, he invokes empire logics as a battleground for this mobilisation. This is echoed by Mignolo's (2012) observation that internal colonies are a reformulation of colonial differences in the modern nation-state and that the 'colonial difference survives with all its force as it is being rearticulated in the new global forms of global power' (p. 197). If "no excuses" constitutes an internal colony, as I have argued, how are these colonial differences reformulated?

One way is the importing of "no excuses" from the US. When a policy moves borders, it is recontextualised according to the specific circumstances of its hosts (Peck and Theodore, 2010; Hyatt, 2013). The deconstruction of the DfE's "no excuses" content through CDA has allowed us to view some of the 'more macro features of policy discourse' including 'recontextualisation' and rhetorical construction (Hyatt, 2013, p. 842). Thus, in response to RQ1, we have demonstrated how the DfE have not only brought the policy to England's shores, but also leant into the evangelical conservatism that surrounds it. Through their discourses of White saviourism, proselytisation, crusades and the urban, the DfE have positioned "no excuses" as an ideological and cultural battleground. And by invoking a quasi-religious missionary endeavour, they have reformulated the colonial difference of its urban internal colonies into a moral war. Employing CPA has allowed us to address one of Diem *et al*'s (2014) fundamental concerns of rhetoric and reality: whereas the ersatz rhetoric paints a picture of moral fortitude, tough benevolence and maverick expediency, the reality of "no excuses" racially objectifies a whole geographical category — the urban — and the individual students within (RQ3). As Bradbury (2020) argues in her CRT framework for

policy analysis, we have been able to see that “no excuses” presents ‘those in power as caring about racial equity (even where this is not the result)’ and that this policy represents ‘new regimes of truth which reinforce the dominance of whiteness’ (p. 247).

However, Apple (1999) urges us to consider intention and function as distinct categories corresponding to self-conscious aims and latent effects, respectively (p. 10). While we cannot be sure of their self-conscious aims, the DfE policy actors’ overt rhetoric reflects its function. The DfE literally talks of a crusade. They very literally speak of a mission. They very literally talk of the urban. The function of this is an urban, cultural and moral battleground. Thus, their face-value intention and function match. They have created a battle arena — spatially expressed — for their tough, maverick — and White — ‘magnificent seven’ cavalry to save the objectified souls of urban children. The enemies are not necessarily the children themselves but the shadows of ideologies and ideologues, enemies of promise and enemies of reform, orthodoxies and dogma. The benefit of fighting shadows is that there is no danger of being harmed yourself and no evidence of harm done to others. In this way, the DfE’s “no excuses” policymaking functions to make the disproportionate racial impact of “no excuses” natural and unremarkable, thus reaffirming the centrality of racism (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Gillborn, 2006b).

Space is a technology of power (Yazdih, 2022). Through the discursive and demographic racial expression of “no excuses”, the DfE set up a missionary, crusading frontier. Because the *urban* is fluid and contested, we can consider it

an epistemological process (Delaney, 2002; Brenner and Schmid, 2015). Thus, its borders are unmappable, even though they are keenly felt by racialised populations (Blaut, 1974; Du Bois, 20008). The *urban*, however, is constituted by those on the outside according to the intent of those conceptualising it (Roy, 2016; Kramer and Jahnke, 2019). In their “no excuses” discourses, the DfE conceptualise the urban as a site of moral crusade and missionary White saviourism. Reading the demographic landscape as a text (Price, 2010), the racially distinct landmarks of “no excuses” represent a realisation of this conceptualisation. Because of this, we can assume the DfE also have a strong racial sense of urban borders. Their urban racial battleground, therefore, represents a frontier.

As such, “no excuses” urban — expressed discursively and geographically quantifiably — is a *de facto* site of struggle against what Chang and Chiang (2022) describe as ‘the white will to improve’ (p. 3). This study’s description of the DfE’s redrawing of the urban boundaries through “no excuses” attests to both this White will to improve and the struggle to resist it; thus, their missionary frontier becomes the racial interface of problem and solution, dominator and dominated, rhetoric and reality.

We opened this section with Gillborn’s (2006a) direct quotation of McLaren (1998), arguing that the logics of empire (McLaren, 1998, p. 63) mobilise ‘structural and cultural forces to defend white power at the expense of the racialised “Other”’ (Gillborn, 2006a, p. 318). McLaren’s quotation offers us much more than just this. It highlights how identifying these empire-building

battlegrounds will help us to combat the racial logics that buttresses White supremacy. In identifying the construction of the internal colonies of “no excuses”, this study’s findings offer the scope to decloak some of White supremacy’s tactics. Thus, in response to the overarching research question, we can say that, yes, the growth and establishment of “no excuses” schools in England *are* racist.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and implications of this research

6.1 Introduction

This study set out to investigate whether the growth and establishment of “no excuses” schools in England are racialised. It drew on CRT’s tenets of the centrality of racism and White supremacy to pose three questions about the public discourses of “no excuses”, racial geographies of the model and its function in rhetoric and reality. To address these questions, this study adopted theoretical tools from within CRT, including QuantCrit, and related frameworks, such as CPA and CDA. In addition, it took an interdisciplinary stance by examining racial geographies. In this chapter, I summarise this study’s key findings and implications for the extant research of “no excuses”, arguing that this study offers two substantive contributions to the field, which we explore in the following section. Then, I consider the implications of this on policy and practice before making recommendations for further research into the racialisation of “no excuses” in England. I argue that while this study does not offer direct recommendations for policy and practice, its findings illuminate the racially problematic nature of “no excuses” that policymakers, policy actors and researchers alike should challenge, especially where it concerns turning our attention to Whiteness’ complicity in the policy’s framing, enactment and outcomes. Finally, I contend that we might use CRT to examine further the racist layers of “no excuses,” including QuantCrit analyses and CPA examinations of the rhetoric, intentions, and functions of the model’s aims.

6.2 Implications of this study

In this section, I argue that this study makes two substantive contributions to the field: methodologically and empirically. I have organised this section by the empirical contributions and highlighted where this study has contributed methodologically and where there are limitations to this study's scope and approach.

6.2.1 “No excuses” has a geographically racialised pattern

This study is consistent with Kobayashi's (2004) notion that race is expressed spatially. In Chapter Four, we saw how the study's “no excuses” schools have a distinctly racial pattern that puts them in sharp demographic contrast to their local authorities and regions. If, as Price (2010) suggests, landscapes are texts of sorts apt to be read, then this study's QuantCrit analysis illuminates “no excuses” schools as racial landmarks. Discursively, this pattern is also readily apparent: the DfE texts' saturation of ‘urban’ discourses, which carry the hallmarks of pejorative and denigrative racist tropes described in CRT and elsewhere (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Kobayashi and Peake, 2000; Picower, 2009; Milner, 2012; Kulz, 2014; Williams *et al*, 2022). In Chapter Two, we established the brutal nature of “no excuses” and this brutality's racial character, especially regarding disproportionate exclusionary outcomes. On these terms, we might consider the urban spatialisation of “no excuses” illuminated in this study as a technology of power (Ray, 2019; Stewart, García and Petersen, 2021; Yazdih, 2022), where ‘race — in all of its complexity and ambiguity, as ideology and

identity — is what it is and does what it does precisely because of how it is given spatial expression’ (Delaney, 2002, p. 7). Thus, White supremacy — the ‘political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources’ (Ansley, 1997, p. 592) — finds a spatial representation in “no excuses” discourses and demographics.

While this finding has illustrated the benefits of an interdisciplinary approach that combines CRT, QuantCrit and geography, there are some limitations. One key issue is that this study could not take a probabilistic sample of “no excuses” (Robson and McCartan, 2016, p. 278) because of the definitional issues described in Chapter Three (section 3.3.1.b). In response, I opted for a purposive sample, a common approach for mixed-method designs (Robson and McCartan, 2016). As a result, this study’s analyses are not generalisable; the findings represent the study’s sample and not necessarily the entire population of “no excuses”. However, each sample “no excuses” school is statistically compared to data compiled from every one of their local authority and regional counterpart schools in the DfE’s (2019) census data. This and the strong statistical significance indicated in the analyses offer robust support for the notion that “no excuses” have a racialised character, at least where the sample is concerned.

Another challenge might come from CRT and QuantCrit itself. Consistent with Sablan’s (2019) critique that a ‘dominant focus’ of CRT’s use of quantitative methods ‘has been descriptive and demographic statistics’ (p. 185), this study’s analysis is also descriptive. She continues:

Descriptive statistics highlight important outcome differences between groups, but they may do little to establish underlying causes or motivations that can guide policy change or the implementation of interventions. (p. 185)

I have sought to follow QuantCrit's exhortation not to let 'data speak for itself' (Gillborn, Warmington and Demack, 2018, p. 158) and have weaved discursive analysis and conceptual explication throughout to enable a discussion that moves beyond pure description toward functional exegesis. However, whether this study has done enough to 'establish causes or motivations that can guide policy change' is open to challenge.

That notwithstanding, this study does address issues of function, as Gillborn (2005), Apple (1999), and Diem *et al* (2014) urge us to do. It does so from CRT and CPA perspectives, respectively. Despite the geographies of the "no excuses" sample schools being so heavily racialised, the DfE's frequent colour-evasive 'urban' and 'poverty' discourses indicate tacit intentionality (Gillborn, 2005). In this way, colour-evasiveness further suppresses and ingrains racism and racist outcomes, as CRT suggests it might (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Rollock and Gillborn, 2011). However, through the heavy racial coding of their 'urban' discourses, the DfE discourses talk about race without appearing to talk about race and function as an oblique dog whistle.

6.2.2 “No excuses” functions to serve White supremacy through White saviourism and proselytising

This study’s findings were broadly consistent with Cole’s (2012) White saviour industrial complex metaphor. The DfE’s militaristic, brutal, ‘tough love’ (Gibb, 2016a [12]) discourses chime with Cole’s ‘brutal policies in the morning’, and their moral rhetoric speaks to the ‘founds charities in the afternoon’ phase and the general ‘big emotional experience’ (p. 1) of White saviourism. There is perhaps no better metaphor for the former than Gove’s ‘magnificent seven’ allusion, which captures some of the evangelical conservative preoccupation with paternal, muscular policymaking (Lakoff, 2002; 2014; Apple, 2006; Brown, 2013; Du Mez, 2020; Willuweit, 2020; Anderson, Knee, and Mowatt, 2021). Although the “no excuses” literature explored in Chapter Two indicates a benevolent side to White saviourism, this study’s policymakers appear to sit morally astride both the brutality and benevolent aspects of the model, seemingly unaware of the contradictions of doing so. In this respect, the DfE’s White saviour discourses function similarly to Picower’s (2009) ‘tools of Whiteness’ where they are at once, both ‘emotional, ideological, and performative’ (p. 197).

As Willuweit (2020) argued, this study finds that the DfE’s White saviourism objectifies its target population. We have already explored the strong evidence that indicates that English sample “no excuses” schools are racialised discursively and geographically. This racialised population — often denoted with the ‘urban’ and ‘poverty’ signifiers — is the pathologised, criminalised substrate upon which “no excuses” crusades and medicalises. Thus, these White saviour discourses find their function as a legitimisation for White supremacy that

simultaneously creates the conditions for the policy problem it defines and “solves” (Cole, 2012; Turner, 2018; Bradbury, 2020). In this way, CPA has been a fruitful lens through which to examine and challenge the rhetorical and functional constitution of race through “no excuses” (Apple, 1999; Diem *et al*, 2014; Bradbury, 2020).

In creating these policy problems and solutions, the DfE’s White saviour discourses also function to proselytise. The DfE couples testimonies of the ‘magnificent seven’ and other “no excuses” celebrants with explicit calls to support this policy movement. This is consistent with what we might expect from extant CPA perspectives — policies and policymakers courting each other across international borders in a marketplace of ideas (Apple, 2006; Peck and Theodore, 2010; Ball, 2016). By identifying another courting signal, this study lends further weight to Allen’s (2004) White hegemonic alliance; the DfE’s rhetoric could function as a dog whistle that activates and engages the uneasy class alliance between non-poor and poor Whites (described in Chapter Four, section 4.5). The ‘poverty’ rhetoric signifies a surface concern with poor Whites, but its alternate ‘urban’ target is unmistakably racialised. The crusading rhetoric signals that the government is dealing with its ‘urban’ problem with urgency and expediency. Thus, through these “no excuses” discourses, Whiteness can look within itself for reassurance and comfort.

However, this focus on Whiteness also represents another limitation of this study. While my analysis indicates a decisive role of Whiteness in asserting its oppressive dominance through “no excuses”, it fails to take into account the

perspectives of people of colour. For Critical Race theorists like Leonardo (2002; 2004) and Gillborn (2019b), looking solely at Whiteness reaffirms its privilege, conferring it with more strength. This study does challenge the master narrative (Capper, 2015; Kee, 2015; Enoch-Stevens *et al*, 2022), but without offering authentic counternarratives (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Bergerson, 2003; Capper, 2015).

6.2.3 “No excuses” constitutes part of a new urban frontier

Ultimately, this study argues that the “no excuses” geographies and discourses constitute a missionary frontier that colonises internally. This is consistent with characterisations of internal colonies that describe their urban pathologisation and economic exploitation (Harris, 1972; Blaut, 1974; Turner, 2018). Within such descriptions, space is effectively a colonising technology of power (Blaut, 1974; Goldberg, 1994; Kobayashi and Peake, 2000; Mignolo, 2012) — as described in Chapter Two and Chapter Five. In accord with Brenner and Schmid (2015), the growth and establishment of “no excuses” through racialised urban populations are emblematic of the continual contestation and struggle of the urban. And just as the urban-as-concept is contested, the urban as a felt geographical reality is, too. The DfE’s consistent use of the ‘urban’ discourse indicates that they, too, are cognizant of the racialised borders described by Du Bois (2008) and Blaut (1974). DfE policymaking functions to contest this space: for “no excuses” to find its problem and solution, it needs space and place for this to happen. The urban is this space. Delaney (2002, p. 7) reminds us of Griffin’s (1995, p. 102) quote that the ‘contest over space is symbolic of the larger contest over black bodies’; “no excuses” — with its “zero tolerance” origins and very explicit desire to battle with

harsh disciplinary tactics that disproportionately impact and exclude — supports this notion. This interdisciplinary study has enabled such spatial racialisation to be identified and challenged.

6.3 Recommendations for policy and practice

Despite the accumulated achievements of CRT in education, Dixson and Rousseau's (2005) clarion title, '[a]nd we are still not saved', rings true. Whiteness and White supremacy find ever-new ways of operating (Ahmed, 2006; Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Bain, 2018; Gillborn, McGimpsey and Warmington, 2022), and this requires a continual need to examine and challenge manifestations of systemic racism in education.

Colour-evasiveness — which Bonilla-Silva (2014) considers part of a “new racism” (p. 25) — represents one such tactical shift. Bonilla-Silva argues that colour-evasiveness repackages oppression into ‘an impregnable yet elastic wall that barricades whites from the United States’ racial reality’ (p. 95). This elasticity requires that we remain vigilant to Whiteness’ shifting frontiers, the likes of which this study has sought to highlight. But education policymakers and practitioners must move beyond performative — or ‘nonperformative’ as Ahmed contests (2006, p. 105) — platitudes and pronouncements that support White ignorance and supremacy (Ahmed, 2006; Bain, 2018; Smith, 2023). In this section, I argue that in addition to highlighting the need to challenge “no excuses” policy and practices, this study’s findings affirm the need to challenge Whiteness and its propensity to look within itself.

6.3.1 The challenges of challenging Whiteness

To what extent is it possible to challenge Whiteness and ‘confront the silence on race in schools’ (López, 2003, p. 68)? Many within CRT call for scholars and practitioners — particularly White scholars and practitioners — to challenge Whiteness (Bergerson, 2003; Allen, 2004; Stovall, 2005a; 2005b; 2006; Allen and Liou, 2019). This means White scholars, policymakers, teachers and leaders not only recognise the uncomfortable reality of their tacit complicity and privilege, but they actively challenge it. While CRT might expose White fragility as being a tactic and signal of Whiteness’ strength (Leonardo, 2004; Gillborn, 2019b), it simultaneously presents a significant barrier to meaningful action that also feeds into expressions of racism (Baggett and Andrzejewski, 2020; Marsh and Walker, 2022). In this regard, good intentions alone are not enough (Gillborn, 2005; Allen, 2004; Milner and Laughter, 2014), but Allen (2004) warns that the potential to be labelled a White ‘race traitor’ (p. 125) might be too much for many to overcome. This challenge is amplified when we consider the uneasy, oppressive relationship of the White hegemonic alliance (Allen, 2009). Indeed, Allen reminds us that while it is right to focus on challenging the oppressed, ‘[a]t the same time, most humans are oppressed, in that there are those of other groups who have more relative privileges’ (Allen, 2004, p. 123). Indeed, in Chapter Two, we saw many examples of this with teachers and leaders being cowed into compliance through the inflexible policies, systems and culture of “no excuses” schools. This is not to say that teachers cannot and will not push back: Golann (2018) found that many subverted or rejected “no excuses” harsh disciplinary practices, and Negrotsky (2022) describes a teacher — Mr David — who ‘pushed back’ (p. 17) at the

tokenistic curriculum choices. However, in Chapter Six, we also saw the DfE's celebration of the cult of personality, where brutal, crusading leaders and policymakers battle unnamed 'enemies of promise' (Gove, 2012a [7]). Even if we discount race traitorship, "no excuses" is an incredibly difficult model for teachers to challenge as its name alone threatens.

Nevertheless, teachers, leaders, policymakers and researchers have a responsibility to challenge the racialisation of "no excuses". Beyond being the basis of this study that offers grounds for such a challenge, CRT has activism at its heart, which Stovall (2005b) considers a 'call to work' that 'operates as a call to get from behind the desk and actively challenge the issues we understand to be "endemic" throughout urban education' (p. 106). Elsewhere, he argues that:

[T]he occupation of the socially conscious scholar is to participate in the activities that challenge hegemony at both the grassroots and intellectual levels. From this, we can engage CRT in education with a concerted effort to change our present realities. (Stovall 2006, p. 243)

From this perspective, this study has changed my values and practices considerably. As a primary teacher educator in an English post-1992 university, I have sought to become a race ally and challenge racism in my curricula and pedagogies and teach my majority White cohorts to see race and racism and their tacit role in such oppression. As White teachers, we must be wary of Bergerson's (2003) warning not to 'use CRT as a method for "understanding" the experiences

of people of colour' (p. 59) and speak on their behalf. Studies such as this one, then, can inform other White researchers, policymakers, teachers, and leaders of the way their Whiteness creates the conditions for and insulates them from the harms of "no excuses" while challenging the growth and establishment of "no excuses" schools. It also reminds us that we need to avoid the temptation of the big emotional experience of White saviourism as we join in allyship with people of colour.

6.3.2 Challenging "no excuses" and harsh disciplinary practices

This study's analysis indicates that "no excuses" growth and establishment are racist, and from this perspective, a key policy recommendation would be to abolish the model. But that may be as unrealistic as it is un-nuanced.

There may be aspects of "no excuses" that could be beneficial, but at this point, any attempts to identify and embed such aspects are speculative. Evidence of some possible benefits come from Harrison (2023), who notes that some of the highest achieving "no excuses" schools in New York have also started to distance themselves from the harsh behaviour practices:

[A]re strict behaviour policies necessary to create efficient learning environments or are they harmful to students and their ability to navigate authority? [...] Surprisingly, what makes these top "no excuses" schools successful is what distances them from the "no excuses" standard definitions. The schools displayed progressive

mathematics pedagogy, reflective and abridged discipline practices,
and strong school cultures that retained both students and teachers.

(p. 1)

This echoes a question raised by Gleason (2017), a “no excuses” proponent: ‘What’s the secret ingredient [...] that make[s] charter schools successful’ (p. 559)? It would appear from New York’s nuances that harsh disciplinary practices would not be on Gleason’s list. Elsewhere, Sedova and Sedlacek (2023) recently found evidence that children with ‘high talk and high internal behavioural engagement’ achieved the best academically, while those with ‘low talk and low internal behavioural engagement performed worst’ (p. 343). If “no excuses” deliberately creates quiet, compliant children that defer autonomy to habituation and external authority (Goodman, 2013; Golann, 2015; Dishon and Goodman, 2017; Ellison and Iqtadar, 2020; Golann and Jones, 2021), they are likely to embody precisely those characteristics which Sedova and Sedlacek (2023) found performed the worst. Chapter Two explored the many harms of the model’s harsh disciplinary practices. In light of this, Sedova and Sedlacek’s (2023) and Harrison’s (2023) studies, we can be fairly confident that harsh disciplinary practices are not one of Gleason’s (2017) secret ingredients. Therefore, we might reasonably argue for “no excuses” — or at least the behavioural components that define them (Cheng et al, 2017; Golann and Torres, 2018) — to be abolished.

However, we should also be wary about any replacements to — or evolutions of — the model, especially in light of the elastic epistemologies that support and obscure the centrality of racism and White supremacy (Ahmed, 2006; Bonilla-

Silva, 2014; Bain, 2018; Smith, 2023). Proponents' distancing of themselves from the model is particularly instructive. For example, in a recent X (formerly Twitter) post, Tom Bennett (2024), the DfE behaviour tsar, is bullish about "no excuses":

There are no schools in the UK that follow a 'no excuses' model. This entire argument is based on tilting at a windmill that doesn't exist. There are lots of schools with high standards, high expectations etc. This is not the same thing, and pretending they are is an enormous disservice to the schools that work incredibly hard to keep often chaotic environments safe for children, and demonstrates a lack of familiarity with the landscape of schools. [...] I invite critics of these brilliant schools to set up their own schools, and demonstrate what they would do instead. Until then, I applaud these brilliant leaders, teachers and staff for the good that they do, because they actually make a difference in the lives of children in the real world.

(Bennett, 2024)

He distances himself from the model while doubling down on praising the strictness. KIPP, too, have started to distance themselves from the model (Lough, 2020) in light of the George Floyd murder and Black Lives Matter movement, and so have others (Millar, 2019; 2020). If "no excuses" — or exclusionary practices generally — were to be abolished as some campaign for (No More Exclusions, 2022; Weale, 2022), what might fill the void, and how might we identify and challenge any racialised harms of its alternatives? This is especially important

when considering how “no excuses” has been protected by elastic epistemologies that defy identification and rebuff challenge (Ahmed, 2006; Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Bain, 2018; Smith, 2023) as identified in this study.

What might these alternatives be? From a negative point of view, exclusionary discipline easily falls off the radar with the informal exclusion described by The Timpson Report (2019), Ofsted (2017) and Gill (2017). Kulz (2013) has already described how the English “no excuses” Mossbourne Academy internally and informally secludes its students. Whatever alternatives are initiated, there are risks that any negative, racialised impact is further entrenched and obscured.

However, positive alternatives have a strong evidential basis from within the CRT, “no excuses”, and school-to-prison-pipeline literature. From a technical practice perspective, restorative practice (RP) is often touted as an alternative or adjunct to “no excuses” (Dunn, 2021; Osher *et al*, 2022; Huang, Gregory and Ward-Seidel, 2023). RP is a ‘nonpunitive approach to dealing with conflict’ that focuses ‘on identifying the needs of those harmed, directly or indirectly, as well as the needs of those causing the harm’ to find a solution and restore trust (Huang, Gregory and Ward-Seidel, 2023, p. 2). It is associated with reduced suspensions for all groups of children and might, therefore, be a more equitable behaviour practice (Osher *et al*, 2022; Huang, Gregory and Ward-Seidel, 2023). However, RP would not fit in with the tough and brutal discourses espoused by the DfE’s policy actors in this study, but individual “no excuses” schools might lean into the nuance suggested by Harrison (2023).

Dealing with the messy reality of the classroom and children's behaviour is a wicked problem that is never likely to be adequately addressed by any one approach, if ever (Armstrong, 2021). Whatever approach is taken, policymakers, teachers and leaders should engage in gathering data to monitor its impacts, especially where they are racialised. This is the spirit this study attempted to embody and is summarised by Carter *et al*'s (2017), 'You can't fix what you don't look at' (p. 207). Such an approach requires autonomy for schools to act on this data and to innovate and truly meet the needs of their students — affordances not available within corporate "no excuses" MATs and schools. McNeal (2022) proposes a policy bundle to overcome the school-to-prison pipeline, including integrating the social work system into education, a school discipline data mandate, mandatory anti-bias training, and school justice partnerships. From a Culturally Responsive Teaching perspective, Keyes (2022) suggests similar: culturally responsive teachers and classrooms, more substantial teacher care, increased student screening, multi-tiered systems of support, engaging students and families, and teacher professional development. Both take the position that data screening is vital, a perspective that fits in very well with CRT's and QuantCrit's exhortations to examine data for racist outcomes (e.g. Gillborn, 2005; 2010a; Crawford, 2019; Crawford *et al*, 2018; Gillborn, Warmington and Demack, 2018). In England, the school-to-prison pipeline has a growing evidence base (Gill, 2017; Cathro, Tagliaferri and Sutherland, 2023). From Chapter Two, we know that "no excuses" is associated with higher rates of racialised exclusions and in this study, we have evidence that "no excuses" are located racially; in lieu

of this information, we have a moral imperative to examine closely exclusion rates, especially where they relate to “no excuses”.

Leaders might also consider their leadership and their teachers’ teaching styles. Rather than the paradoxically brutal but benevolent White saviour leaders the DfE’s discourses promote in this study’s findings, Stovall (2004) argues that we might encourage leadership that negotiates ‘the function of the school’s ability to serve students’ with ‘the charge of fostering a learning community’ (p. 10). He contests that being a school leader is a difficult role that ‘requires humility’ to navigate ‘messy and conflictual racial realities’ (p. 11) but that ‘they must garner support from the communities they work in and with’ (p. 12) and can do so with CRT principles. Elsewhere, Stovall (2005b) argues that leaders might follow an Umoja approach where:

Instead of viewing administrators and faculty as the primary contributors to the education process, they are viewed as facilitators. The idea is that the school is not meant to replace the family or community at large. Instead, it should be an extension of both. And for that reason the views, values, and beliefs should be shaped, formed, and challenged in each area. (p. 100)

Such an approach is incompatible with the DfE’s rhetoric that constitutes students and their culture as a battleground. However, changing these narratives from missionary crusades to collaborative negotiation can make a positive difference.

For example, Ko, Bal, and Artiles (2022) found that inaugurating a Learning Lab within school communities that sought to build agency, explicate and envision systemic solutions, commit to actions, and take actions might address racially disproportionate disciplinary outcomes. To move beyond “no excuses” requires policymakers and leaders to relinquish their rhetorical militancy.

If policymakers really want to establish and grow a heavily racialised policy — as this study has shown is the case with “no excuses” — it is incumbent on them to be open and transparent so they can be held to account. Such a view is a pipedream at best — White supremacy thrives from hiding racism (e.g. Gillborn, 2005; Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Thus, activists and researchers must take that burden to hold a mirror up to “no excuses” policymakers, a topic we take up in the final section of this study.

6.4 Recommendations for future research

Using CRT in this study has opened a means of examining the majoritarian narrative around “no excuses” and its racialising nature, but CRT opens up other avenues for research not pursued here, such as authentic counter-narratives and other QuantCrit analyses.

This study has found evidence for the racialising nature of “no excuses” schools in England; as already alluded to, a crucial next step is to gather counternarratives of pupils, parents, teachers and communities at the sharp end

of their harsh disciplinary practices. Such research has been carried out in the US but not in England. As we saw in Chapter Two, studies such as James-Gallaway's (2022) autoethnography and Marsh and Wilkerson' (2021) interviews illuminated some of the darker phenomenological corners of teachers' and students' experiences of "no excuses" and their attempts at resistance. Kee (2015), however, uses secondary representations of counternarratives to challenge the "no excuses" discourses in New Orleans. All of these studies allow the researchers to 'speak back/against racial oppression and marginalisation' (Johnson, 2018, p. 110) and avoid placing White discourses centre stage at the expense of discourses of racism and people of colour (Bergerson, 2003, p. 56). Unfortunately, this was out of the purview of my study due to COVID and the limitations of being a self-funded researcher. However, Kulz (2013; 2014) conducted an ethnographic study of Mossbourne Academy in England, but without CRT as part of its theoretical framework. Connecting the dots between my study and Kulz's studies with a CRT-oriented counternarrative approach would be a fruitful and timely way to consider the racialisation found in both.

This study highlights our wide scope for building narratives using quantitative data, especially taking an interdisciplinary approach with geography. Garcia and Mayorga (2018) remind us of the 'threat of unexamined secondary data' in the title of their mixed-methods paper; QuantCrit offers us a powerful tool to challenge further the threat of "no excuses" in England. While this study analysed secondary census data at the publicly released school level, further study at the pupil level might also reveal other layers of racialisation. For example, in the UK, we have studies that indicate disproportionate racial exclusions across state education

generally (Gill, 2017; Gillborn and Demack, 2018; Timpson, 2019; Gillborn *et al*, 2021; Stewart-Hall, Langham and Miller, 2023), but we do not know how “no excuses” influences — or is influenced by — racialised exclusionary outcomes. Examining the pupil-level data on the Government’s National Pupil Database (Jay, McGrath-Lone, Gilbert, 2019) would allow such a QuantCrit analysis to be carried out through, for example, odds-ratio analysis (Connolly, 2007) as exemplified by Gillborn, Warmington and Demack (2018, p. 165). Because this data is gatekept by the DfE (2024), such an analysis was not possible for this study. Nevertheless, this would be important work to undertake, and this study has demonstrated the viability and value of compiling a database of “no excuses” schools to attempt such an endeavour.

Beyond CRT, this study reinforces the need to explore the rhetorical and functional bases of “no excuse” in England from adjunct CPA and CDA perspectives. Just as nuance has been an evolutionary feature of “no excuses” in the US, and there is still no consensus on its “secret ingredients” (Cheng *et al*, 2017; Gleason, 2017; Harrison, 2023), we might also research the impact of the various parts of Cheng *et al*’s (2017) and Golan and Torres’ (2018) meta-analytic and 4C definitions, respectively. In one of the unpublished assignments for the taught component of this EdD (Whittaker, 2018), I found that schools emphasised different aspects of the “no excuses” discourse depending on their context: one promoted the primacy of organisational structure over individual, pupil-level agency; the other used the “no excuses” slogan to mark their extraordinariness (Braun, Maguire and Ball, 2010) despite the behaviour policy being devoid of Golann and Torres’ (2018) 4Cs. Thus, combining CRT with CPA or CDA — as

this study has done — to examine the nuances between schools’ discursive constitution of “no excuses” — in addition to the way it is enacted (Maguire *et al*, 2011) — could reveal the way the model is recontextualised nationally and locally and offer indications of its changing, racialising impact.

Finally, this study examines how “no excuses” is discursively constructed — and discursively constructs — in a racialised way. By doing so, it questions the relative racial silences of “no excuses” rhetoric in stark contrast to the heavy racism apparent in its geographical distribution. A similar approach to looking at the explicit and tacit intentions of “no excuses” could be a productive research stream. Torres (2022) argues that researchers should ‘dramatically expand their definition of desirable outcomes to focus on to determine the impact of no-excuses schools’ (p. 162). In England, this might involve examining the exemplary GCSE results and “outstanding” rating of the Michaela Community School (2024; Ofsted, 2023a) despite its impoverished range of subjects in its curriculum (Mansell, 2023). While Ofsted (2023a) praised Michaela for a ‘broad and exceptionally rich curriculum’ (p. 1), it does not offer Design and Technology or Computing (Mansell, 2023) to its students because of Birbalsingh’s (2023a) ‘need to offer subjects which I [she] can easily staff.’ Indeed, we might question if other schools might receive an “outstanding” Ofsted rating with a similarly impoverished curriculum, even despite protestations that ‘[i]t is hard to find some teachers over others’ (Birbalsingh, 2023a) and a school might be ‘a small school with limited resources’ (Birbalsingh, 2023b). This sort of educational double standard might be the basis of research around the policy prescriptions for racialised populations and also the desirability of strong academic results in lieu

of a 'full curriculum' delivered by 'teaching a full range of subjects for as long as possible' (Ofsted, 2023b). Thus, as this study has done, we might challenge "no excuses"" racialisation further on its overt and tacit intentions.

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Appendix 1: The sample “no excuses” schools

School details			MAT details		Eligibility					
School name	Address	Phase	Part of a MAT?	MAT schools	Meets Cheng et al's (2017) definition	Meets Golann & Torres' (2017) definition	Meets Golann & Torres' (2017) definition with discretion	NE referenced on the school website?	NE referenced on the MAT website?	NE referenced on policy?
The Nuneaton Academy	Nuneaton, Warwickshire	Secondary	The Midlands Academies Trust	4	×	✓	×	✓	×	✓
Castleford Academy	Castleford	Secondary	Castleford Academy Trust	5	×	×	✓	×	×	✓
Richard Cobden Primary School	London	Primary	n/a	n/a	×	×	✓	✓	×	✓
Moor Green Primary Academy	Birmingham	Primary	REAch2 Academy Trust	60	×	×	✓	✓	×	✓
Rockwood Academy	Birmingham	Secondary	Core Education Trust	4	×	×	✓	✓	×	×
Sarah Bonnell School	London	Secondary	n/a	n/a	×	×	✓	✓	×	✓
Dixons Music Primary	Bradford	Primary	Dixons Academy Trust	12	×	×	✓	✓	×	✓
Barr Beacon Academy	Walsall	Secondary	Matrix Academy Trust	4	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	×
Bloxwich Academy (Primary Site)	Walsall	Primary	Matrix Academy Trust	6	×	✓	×	✓	✓	×
Bloxwich Academy	Walsall	Secondary	Matrix Academy Trust	4	×	×	✓	×	✓	✓

School details			MAT details		Eligibility					
School name	Address	Phase	Part of a MAT?	MAT schools	Meets Cheng et al's (2017) definition	Meets Golann & Torres' (2017) definition	Meets Golann & Torres' (2017) definition on with discretion	NE referenced on the school website ?	NE referenced on the MAT website ?	NE referenced on policy?
(Secondary Site)										
Chigwell Primary Academy	Chigwell	Primary	REAch2 Academy Trust	60	×	✓	×	×	✓	×
Dame Elizabeth Cadbury	Birmingham	Secondary	Matrix Academy Trust	4	×	×	✓	✓	✓	✓
Etone College	Nuneaton	Secondary	Matrix Academy Trust	4	×	×	✓	✓	✓	✓
The George Eliot School	Nuneaton	Secondary	The Midlands Academies Trust	4	×	×	✓	✓	×	✓
Hartshill School	Nuneaton	Secondary	The Midlands Academies Trust	4	×	×	✓	×	×	✓
Brampton Primary Academy	London	Primary	REAch2 Academy Trust	60	×	×	✓	×	×	✓
Riverside Academy	Newbold-On-Avon	Primary	REAch2 Academy Trust	60	×	×	✓	×	×	✓
Pimlico Academy	London	Secondary	Future Academies	10	×	×	✓	×	✓	✓
Lathom High School	Skelmersdale	Secondary	n/a	n/a	×	✓	×	✓	×	✓
Phoenix Academy	London	Secondary	Future Academies	10	×	✓	×	×	✓	✓

School details			MAT details		Eligibility					
School name	Address	Phase	Part of a MAT?	MAT schools	Meets Cheng et al's (2017) definition	Meets Golann & Torres' (2017) definition	Meets Golann & Torres' (2017) definition with discretion	NE referenced on the school website ?	NE referenced on the MAT website ?	NE referenced on policy?
Laureate Academy	Hemel Hempstead	Secondary	Future Academies	10	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Barclay Academy	Stevenage	Secondary	Future Academies	10	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
Coop Academy Manchester	Manchester	Secondary	Coop Academies	27	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
The Grange Academy	Bushey	Secondary	Future Academies	10	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
Future Academies Watford	Watford	Secondary	Future Academies	10	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
Trinity Academy	London	Secondary	Future Academies	10	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
Coop Academy Bebington	Bebington	Secondary	Coop Academies	27	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓
Dixons Trinity Chapelton	Leeds	Through : Primary, Secondary	Dixons Academy Trust	12	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
Dixons Allerton Academy	Bradford	Through : Primary, Secondary	Dixons Academy Trust	12	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
Dixons City Academy	Bradford	Secondary	Dixons Academy Trust	12	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓

School details			MAT details		Eligibility					
School name	Address	Phase	Part of a MAT?	MAT schools	Meets Cheng et al's (2017) definition	Meets Golann & Torres' (2017) definition	Meets Golann & Torres' (2017) definition with discretion	NE referenced on the school website?	NE referenced on the MAT website?	NE referenced on policy?
Dixons Kings Academy	Bradford	Secondary	Dixons Academy Trust	12	x	✓	x	x	✓	x
Dixons Cottingley Academy	Bradford	Secondary	Dixons Academy Trust	12	x	✓	x	x	✓	x
Dixons McMillan Academy	Bradford	Secondary	Dixons Academy Trust	12	x	✓	x	✓	✓	✓
Dixons Unity Academy	Leeds	Secondary	Dixons Academy Trust	12	x	✓	x	✓	✓	x
Dixons Trinity Academy	Bradford	Secondary	Dixons Academy Trust	12	x	✓	x	✓	✓	✓
Michaela Community School	Wembley	Secondary	n/a	n/a	✓	x	✓	✓	x	x
Ark Academy	Wembley	Through : Primary, Secondary	Ark	38	x	✓	x	x	✓	x
Ark Acton Academy	London	Secondary	Ark	38	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓
Ark Alexandra Academy	Hastings	Secondary	Ark	38	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓
Ark All Saints Academy	London	Secondary	Ark	38	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓

School details			MAT details		Eligibility					
School name	Address	Phase	Part of a MAT?	MAT schools	Meets Cheng et al's (2017) definition	Meets Golann & Torres' (2017) definition	Meets Golann & Torres' (2017) definition with discretion	NE referenced on the school website?	NE referenced on the MAT website?	NE referenced on policy?
Ark Atwood Primary Academy	London	Primary	Ark	38	×	✓	×	✓	✓	✓
Ark Ayrton Nursery	Portsmouth	Nursery	Ark	38	×	✓	×	×	✓	×
Ark Bentworth Primary Academy	London	Primary	Ark	38	×	×	✓	×	✓	×
Ark Blacklands Primary Academy	Hastings	Primary	Ark	38	×	×	✓	×	✓	×
Ark Blake Academy	London	Secondary	Ark	38	×	×	✓	×	✓	✓
Ark Bolingbroke Academy	London	Secondary	Ark	38	×	×	✓	×	✓	×
Ark Boulton Academy	Birmingham	Secondary	Ark	38	×	✓	×	×	✓	✓
Ark Brunel Primary Academy	London	Primary	Ark	38	×	×	✓	×	✓	×
Ark Burlington Danes Academy	London	Primary, Secondary, Sixth Form	Ark	38	×	×	✓	×	✓	×

School details			MAT details		Eligibility					
School name	Address	Phase	Part of a MAT?	MAT schools	Meets Cheng et al's (2017) definition	Meets Golann & Torres' (2017) definition	Meets Golann & Torres' (2017) definition with discretion	NE referenced on the school website?	NE referenced on the MAT website?	NE referenced on policy?
Ark Byron Primary Academy	London	Primary	Ark	38	x	x	✓	x	✓	x
Ark Castle Down Primary Academy	Hastings	Primary	Ark	38	x	x	✓	x	✓	x
Ark Charter Academy	Portsmouth	Secondary	Ark	38	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	x
Ark Conway Primary Academy	London	Primary	Ark	38	x	✓	x	x	✓	x
Ark Dickens Primary Academy	Portsmouth	Nursery, Primary	Ark	38	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	x
Ark Elvin Academy	London	Secondary	Ark	38	x	x	✓	x	✓	x
Ark Evelyn Grace Academy	London	Secondary, Sixth Form	Ark	38	x	✓	x	x	✓	x
Ark Franklin Primary Academy	London	Nursery, Primary	Ark	38	x	x	✓	x	✓	x
Ark Globe Academy	London	Through : Nursery, Primary, Secondary,	Ark	38	x	x	✓	x	✓	x

School details			MAT details		Eligibility					
School name	Address	Phase	Part of a MAT?	MAT schools	Meets Cheng et al's (2017) definition	Meets Golann & Torres' (2017) definition	Meets Golann & Torres' (2017) definition with discretion	NE referenced on the school website?	NE referenced on the MAT website?	NE referenced on policy?
		Sixth Form								
Ark Greenwich Free School	London	Secondary	Ark	38	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
Ark Isaac Newton Academy	London	Through : Nursery, Primary, Secondary, Sixth Form	Ark	38	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
Ark John Archer Primary Academy	London	Primary, Nursery	Ark	38	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
Ark John Keats Academy	London	Through : Primary, Secondary, Sixth Form	Ark	38	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
Ark Kings Academy	Birmingham	Through : Primary, Secondary, Sixth Form	Ark	38	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
Ark King Solomon Academy	London	Through : Nursery, Primary, Secondary, Sixth Form	Ark	38	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗

School details			MAT details		Eligibility					
School name	Address	Phase	Part of a MAT?	MAT schools	Meets Cheng et al's (2017) definition	Meets Golann & Torres' (2017) definition	Meets Golann & Torres' (2017) definition with discretion	NE referenced on the school website?	NE referenced on the MAT website?	NE referenced on policy?
Ark Little Ridge Primary Academy	St Leonards-on-sea	Primary	Ark	38	x	x	✓	x	✓	x
Ark Oval Primary Academy	London	Primary	Ark	38	x	x	✓	✓	✓	x
Ark Pioneer Academy	London	Secondary	Ark	38	✓	x	✓	x	✓	x
Ark Priory Primary Academy	London	Nursery, Primary	Ark	38	x	x	✓	✓	✓	x
Ark Putney Academy	London	Secondary, Sixth Form	Ark	38	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓
Ark St Alban's Academy	Birmingham	Secondary, Sixth Form	Ark	38	✓	x	✓	x	✓	x
Ark Swift Primary Academy	London	Nursery, Primary	Ark	38	x	x	✓	x	✓	x
Ark Tindal Primary Academy	Birmingham	Primary	Ark	38	x	x	x	x	✓	x
Ark Victoria Academy	Birmingham	Through : Primary, Secondary	Ark	38	✓	x	✓	x	✓	x
Ark Walworth	London	Secondary,	Ark	38	✓	x	✓	x	✓	x

School details			MAT details		Eligibility					
School name	Address	Phase	Part of a MAT?	MAT schools	Meets Cheng et al's (2017) definition	Meets Golann & Torres' (2017) definition	Meets Golann & Torres' (2017) definition with discretion	NE referenced on the school website ?	NE referenced on the MAT website ?	NE referenced on policy?
Academy		Sixth Form								

Appendix 2: DfE text longlist

The long list of initial search results for the terms *no excuses* and *zero tolerance* on the DfE website in their *Education, Training and Skills* section.

Title	Who	Date	Type	Search Term Hit	Date Searched	Included in the study	Eligible	Eligibility Notes
Michael Gove on bullying and bad classroom discipline in 'News of the World'	Michael Gove	7 September 2010	Authored Article	Zero tolerance	14/05/20	✓	✓	Discipline references in the title and 'new powers' referenced within.
Schools Minister calls for action against school bullies	Nick Gibb	15 November 2010	News Story	Zero tolerance	14/05/20	x	x	Only a fleeting mention of "no excuses" discipline.
Michael Gove to the National College Annual Conference, Birmingham	Michael Gove	25 November 2010	Speech	No excuse	14/05/20	✓	✓	Overt reference to 'a culture of no excuses, tough discipline'.
Schools Minister Nick Gibb responds to key stage 2 attainment statistics	Nick Gibb	9 December 2010	News Story	Zero tolerance	14/05/20	✓	✓	Overt reference to behaviour, e.g. 'raising standards of behaviour in schools' and 'supporting teachers and headteachers in their effort to instil a zero-tolerance approach to poor behaviour and low level disruption in class.'
Key stage 2 achievement statistics published	Nick Gibb	14 December 2010	News Story	Zero tolerance	14/05/20	✓	✓	Overt reference to behaviour, e.g. 'raising of standards of behaviour in schools' and 'supporting teachers and headteachers to

Title	Who	Date	Type	Search Term Hit	Date Searched	Included in the study	Eligible	Eligibility Notes
								instil a zero-tolerance approach to poor behaviour in class.'
New powers for teachers to improve discipline in schools	Michael Gove	4 April 2011	Press release	No excuse	14/05/20	✓	✓	Direct reference to "no excuses" in relation to a "no excuses" school, Pimlico.
Schools Minister congratulates winners of first ever Stonewall Education Equality Index	Nick Gibb	1 July 2011	News Story	Zero tolerance	14/05/20	x	x	About bullying and homophobia, not behaviour.
Michael Gove speech on academies	Michael Gove	11 January 2012	Speech	No excuse	14/05/20	✓	✓	Direct reference to "no excuses" model, including US expression and King Solomon Academy.
High expectation, no excuses	Michael Wilshaw	9 February 2012	Press release	No excuse	14/05/20	✓	✓	Direct reference to a desire to inculcate "no excuses" discipline cultures.
Education Secretary Michael Gove's speech to ASCL	Michael Gove	26 March 2012	Speech	No excuse	14/05/20	✓	✓	Passages about discipline and reference to King Solomon Academy.
How are the children? Achievement for all in the 21st Century	Michael Gove	27 June 2012	Speech	Zero tolerance	14/05/20	x	x	"Zero tolerance" to failure but no reference to a culture of "no excuses" discipline.
Parents get more information about school performance	Michael Gove	6 March 2013	News story	No excuse	14/05/20	x	x	"No excuse" to poor attainment but no reference to a culture of "no excuses" discipline.

Title	Who	Date	Type	Search Term Hit	Date Searched	Included in the study	Eligible	Eligibility Notes
Michael Gove speech to teachers and headteachers at the National College for Teaching and Leadership	Michael Gove	25 April 2013	Speech	No excuse	14/05/20	x	x	Beyond the fleeting reference to working with Tom Bennett, not overtly about behaviour.
Lord Nash addresses the National Governors' Association (NGA) conference	Lord Nash	8 July 2013	Speech	No excuse	14/05/20	x	x	About governors and no reference to behaviour.
Michael Gove speaks about the future of vocational education	Michael Gove	3 March 2014	Speech	No excuse	14/05/20	x	x	About business and no reference to behaviour.
130,000 fewer pupils regularly missing school	Michael Gove	25 March 2014	Press release	No excuse	14/05/20	✓	✓	Overt reference to 'determination to get tough on bad behaviour' and tough measures.
Michael Gove: an education system which works for every child	Michael Gove	1 April 2014	Speech	No excuse	14/05/20	x	x	About employment and no reference to behaviour.
Careers guidance	Matt Hancock	10 April 2014	Written statement to Parliament	No excuse	14/05/20	x	x	About employment and no reference to behaviour.
SCHOOLS NorthEast Summit 2015	Michael Wilshaw	15 October 2015	Speech	No excuse	14/05/20	✓	✓	Distinct references to "no excuse" cultures and discipline.
Nick Gibb: how autonomy raises standards	Nick Gibb	12 November 2015	Speech	No excuse	14/05/20	✓	✓	Draws heavily on US "no excuses" and uses King Solomon Academy as a case study.

Title	Who	Date	Type	Search Term Hit	Date Searched	Included in the study	Eligible	Eligibility Notes
PM Speech: This is a government that delivers	David Cameron	7 December 2015	Speech	Zero tolerance	14/05/20	x	x	Talks about discipline in schools but not in line with the two “no excuses” definitions: their “zero tolerance” is to failure.
Nick Gibb: the importance of school leadership	Nick Gibb	26 January 2016	Speech	No excuse	14/05/20	✓	✓	Draws on King Solomon Academy as a case study and overt references to behaviour.
Nicky Morgan: a world-class education system for every child	Nicky Morgan	24 February 2016	Speech	No excuse	14/05/20	✓	✓	King Solomon Academy as a case study. Link to academisation.
Nicky Morgan: end the demography of destiny	Nicky Morgan	5th March 2016	Speech	Zero tolerance	14/05/20	x	✓	Their “zero tolerance” is to failure; no mention of behaviour.
Nick Gibb: the role of leadership in school improvement	Nick Gibb	9 May 2016	Speech	No excuse	14/05/20	✓	✓	King Solomon Academy as a case study. Link to academisation.
Amanda Spielman launches Ofsted's Annual Report 2017/18	Amanda Spielman	4 December 2018	Speech	Zero tolerance	14/05/20	x	x	“No excuses” refers to parents and failure; does not promote behaviour approaches in line with the two definitions.
HMCI commentary: managing behaviour research	Amanda Spielman	12 September 2019	Authored Article	Zero tolerance	14/05/20	x	✓	Outside the eligible time window.
Education Secretary sets ambition for international collaboration	Gavin Williamson	20 January 2020	Speech	No excuse	14/05/20	x	x	Outside the eligible time window.

Title	Who	Date	Type	Search Term Hit	Date Searched	Included in the study	Eligible	Eligibility Notes
Experts to help tackle poor behaviour in schools	Gavin Williamson	28 February 2020	Press release	No excuse	14/05/20	x	✓	Outside the eligible time window.

Appendix 3: DfE text coding example

1. Home (<https://www.gov.uk/>)

2. Education, training and skills (<https://www.gov.uk/education>)

3. Inspections and performance of education providers (<https://www.gov.uk/education/inspections-and-performance-of-education-providers>)

4. Inspection and performance of schools (<https://www.gov.uk/education/inspection-and-performance-of-schools>)

Speech

Michael Gove to the National College Annual Conference, Birmingham

The Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, addresses the National College's Annual Conference in Birmingham.

From: Department for Education (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education>) and The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP (<https://www.gov.uk/government/people/michael-gove>)

Published: 25 November 2010

This was published under the 2010 to 2015 Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government

Location: Birmingham

Delivered on: 16 June 2010 (Original script, may differ from what was said)



Thank you Tony for that kind introduction.

And thank you all, for the work that you do.

The service you give, the leadership you show, the example you set - they are all inspiring.

are what make my work worthwhile.

wonderful thing about my job is the opportunity it gives me to see the very best of this country - young people achieving more than they ever thought they could, finding their special talent, taking charge of their own destinies, becoming authors of their own life stories.

Seeing the work you do - often against the odds, in difficult circumstances, with tight resources and challenging intakes - reaffirms one of my deepest convictions - there is no way to spend your life which is more admirable than following the vocation which inspires all of you - the calling to teach.

And there is no way I can do this job without listening to you as you explain what drives you, what your ambitions are for the children and young people in your care and what Government can do to serve you.

Which is why I was so glad to hear what Steve had to say - because the political leadership I want to provide is all about service. It should be Government's job to help, serve and support you - not direct, patronise and fetter you.

I believe that heads and teachers are the best people to run schools - not politicians or bureaucrats.

The people from whom I have learnt the most while in politics have been headteachers - people like Fiona Hammans at Banbury School, Joan McVittie at Woodside High, Mike Wilshaw at Mossbourne Community Academy, Mike Griffiths at Northampton School for Boys, Mike Spinks at Urmston Grammar, Sue John at Lampton School, Patricia Sower at Cuckoo Hall, Sally Coates at Burlington Danes, and so many more.

At the heart of this Government's vision for education is a determination to give school leaders more power and control. Not just to drive improvement in their own schools - but to drive improvement across our whole education system.

Looking back over the last 15 years there are a number of things I could criticise - but I won't - instead I want to celebrate the gains which have been made - and one of the most important is the development and deepening of culture in which we recognise that it is professionals, not bureaucratic strategies and initiatives, which drive school improvement.

Teachers grow as professionals by allowing their work to be observed by other professionals, and observing the very best in their field, in turn.

Headteachers improve their schools fastest and most effectively by working with other heads who have been on that journey. And both sides gain from the collaboration. Mentoring others is often the best form of professional development.

The whole culture of the National College under Steve has been informed by this vision of system-led leadership that taps into the profound moral purpose of the profession, which is why I am so grateful to him - and especially admiring of what has been achieved by all of you who are National Leaders of Education.

Moral purpose

But admiring as I am of what has been achieved I am, frankly, impatient for us all, as a nation, to do better.

Harold Wilson once said of the Labour Party, it is a moral crusade or it is nothing. Well, whatever view one takes of the Labour Party's history, I believe that we have to ensure there is a driving, crusading, vision at the heart of our Government's education policy. Or we will forfeit our mandate.

Unless we are guided by moral purpose in this coalition government then we will squander the goodwill the British people have, so generously, shown us.

And the ethical imperative of our education policy is quite simple - we have to make opportunity more equal.

We have to overcome the deep, historically entrenched, factors which keep so many in poverty, which deprive so many of the chance to shape their own destiny, which have made us the sick man of Europe when it comes to social mobility.

It is a unique sadness of our times that we have one of the most stratified and segregated school systems in the developed world.

We know, from Leon Feinstein's work, that low ability children from rich families overtake high ability children from poor families during primary school.

And the gap grows as the children get older. A child eligible to free school meals is half as likely to achieve five or more GCSEs at grade A*-C, including English and maths, than a child from a wealthier background.

By 18 the gap is vast. In the most recent year for which we have data, out of 80,000 young people eligible for free school meals, just 45 made it to Oxbridge. That's fewer than some private schools manage by themselves.

We are clearly, as a nation, still wasting talent on a scale which is scandalous. It is a moral failure, an affront against social justice which we have to put right.

And that is why I am so glad that at the heart of our Coalition's programme for Government is a commitment to spending more on the education of the poorest. The pupil premium - supported by Conservatives but championed with special passion and developed in detail by our Liberal Democrat partners - is a policy designed to address disadvantage at root. By giving resources to the people who matter most in extending opportunity - school leaders and teachers.

And far from difficult economic times being a reason to scale down our ambitions, the economic challenges we face are only reason to accelerate our reform programme.

the days are long gone - if they ever existed - when we could afford to educate a minority of our children well while hoping we were being schooled adequately.

Today China and India are turning out more engineers, more computer scientists and more university graduates than the whole of Europe and America combined.

And the success of other nations in harnessing their intellectual capital is a function of their determination to develop world-beating education systems. Across the globe other nations are outpacing us - pulling ahead in international comparisons, driving innovation, changing their systems to give professionals more freedom to grow, adapt, improve and learn from each other...

It is no longer enough, if it ever was, to say we as a nation are doing better than we did in the past. As Matt Ridley's wonderful new book Rational Optimism shows, in almost every field of human endeavour we are doing exponentially better than we did in the past. The real test is how are we doing compared to the rest. And in particular how are we doing compared to the best.

Learning from overseas

We have to ask ourselves how our 16-year-olds are doing relative to 16-year olds in Scandinavia, Singapore, Canada and Australasia.

Unless we learn from those nations which are innovating most imaginatively and successfully then we will be failing in our duty to the young people who are in our care while we hold office.

And the pace of change across the globe is accelerating. Many of those nations which are now the world's strongest performers, from Finland to South Korea, were well behind us in levels of educational achievement a generation ago. Now they put us to shame.

Twenty years ago we were 14th in the world when nations were measured on how well they educated their teenagers. Now we are 23rd.

In English, Maths and Science, the figures from the most respected international comparisons also show us falling behind other nations.

For the fourth-largest economy in the world, with a much higher than average level of investment in education and some of the most talented professionals anywhere in the globe, this performance simply isn't good enough.

But while the comparisons are sobering, the reasons to be optimistic are plentiful. Indeed most of them are in this room.

If you look at the most successful education systems in the world - those with the best absolute performance - and those with the highest levels of equity across classes - they all tend to have certain common features.

They extend a high level of autonomy to individual schools.

School leaders are empowered to innovate in their own schools.

And they are expected to lead the drive for improvement in other schools.

The political leadership is uncompromising in the drive for higher standards.

There is a culture of high expectations which does not allow excuses to be made for poor performance on the basis of class, ethnicity or background.

There is a proper national framework of accountability.

Which includes the transparent publication of academic performance on a school-by-school basis with proper, externally set and marked, testing

And an inspection regime which is very light touch for high performing institutions so the real focus can be on under-performance.

Teaching is a high status profession which draws its recruits from among the highest performing graduates.

There is a strong culture of professional development which encourages teachers to improve their craft by learning from others while also deepening their academic knowledge.

All of these features - which characterise the best education systems in the world - are present in England. But not to the degree we require to keep pace with the world's best.

Indeed, over the last three years I fear Government action has held our education system back from making many of the advances we needed to make to keep pace with the best.

Ministers decreased school autonomy, tried to drive improvement through bureaucratic compliance, complicated the inspection regime and simultaneously weakened and complicated our system of accountability.

The prospect of radical reform along the lines of the world's best education systems, envisaged in the 2005 Education White Paper, was never fulfilled.

And while we moved back on reform, the pace of change in other nations accelerated.

President Obama is pressing ahead with radical school reform to close the gap between rich and poor. He has offered support to programmes designed to attract more great people into teaching and leadership, as well as encouraging states to provide greater accountability to parents and welcome new providers into state education.

He has insisted - along with other Democrat reformers like Arne Duncan, Joel Klein and Michelle Rhee - that there be more great Charter schools - the equivalent of our Academies - to drive up attainment, especially among the poorest. In New York, Charter schools - like the Inspirational Knowledge is Power Programme schools - have dramatically narrowed the vast performance gap between black and white children and 91 per cent of those benefiting are on free or reduced price meals.

With a relentless focus on traditional subjects, a culture of no excuses, tough discipline, personalised pastoral care and enthusiastic staff who work free from Government bureaucracy to help every child succeed, these schools are amazing engines of social mobility that are now sending children from ghetto areas to elite universities.

In Canada, and specifically in Alberta, schools have also been liberated - given the autonomy enjoyed by charter schools in the US. Head teachers control their own budgets, set their own ethos and shape their own environments.

In Calgary and Edmonton, a diverse range of autonomous schools offer professionals freedom and parents choice.

And the result?

Alberta now has the best performing state schools of any English-speaking regions.

In Sweden, the old bureaucratic monopoly that saw all state schools run by local government was ended and the system opened up to allow new, non-selective, state schools to be set up by a range of providers.

It has allowed greater diversity, increased parental choice and has seen results improve - with results improving fastest of all in the areas where schools exercised the greatest degree of autonomy and parents enjoyed the widest choice.

Finland is often deliberately contrasted with Sweden because of the supposed rigidity of its education system.

But by placing a premium on specialism, diversity and parental choice within that framework, they too are driving up standards.

In Singapore, again often held up as a model of regimented Prussian-style centralism, dramatic leaps in attainment have been secured by schools where principals are exercising a progressively greater degree of operational autonomy. The Government has deliberately encouraged greater diversity in the schools system and as the scope for innovation has grown, so Singapore's competitive advantage over other nations has grown too.

School improvement

It is these examples - and these lessons - that explains our philosophical approach to education perhaps better than anything.

The most important people in driving school improvement aren't inspectors, advisers, school improvement partners or Ministers.

It is teachers and school leaders.

And that is why I am passionate about extending the freedoms denied to you by the last government.

One of the first things we have done is give professionals more scope to drive improvement by inviting all schools to consider applying for academy freedoms.

This is an addition to, rather than replacement of the existing academies programmes. We will continue to ensure that academies are used to drive faster and deeper improvements in deprived and disadvantaged areas.

But we will now also provide you with the kind of autonomy that has served schools in America, Canada, Sweden and Finland so well and allow all schools the freedom to develop their own curriculum and fully control their own budget and staffing.

Since I issued my invitation to schools three weeks ago, I have been overwhelmed by the response.

More than 1772 schools have enquired about academy freedoms.

870 outstanding schools - including 405 secondary schools and more than 400 outstanding primaries have contacted us - and will lead the way.

That's 70 per cent of the outstanding secondary schools in the country and a significant cohort of outstanding primaries.

I know some have expressed concern that this offer of greater autonomy for schools will work against the collaborative model of school improvement that has grown up over the past fifteen or so years and which has done so much to tackle under-performance in those schools in the most challenging circumstances.

Let me be clear: I would not be going down this road if I thought it would in any way set back the process of school improvement, if would in any way undermine the progress we need to make in our weakest or most challenged schools or if it would in any way fracture the culture of collaboration which has driven school improvement over the last decade.

This policy is driven, like all our education policy, by our guiding moral purpose - the need to raise attainment for all children and close the gap between the richest and poorest.

I believe this policy will only work if it strengthens the bonds between schools and leads to a step-change in system-led leadership.

NOT RACE.

Why I will expect of every school that acquires academy freedoms that it partners at least one other school to help drive improvement across the board.

That is why I envisage a bigger role for the National College and the programme of National Leaders of Education in brokering and providing support from great schools for those who need help to improve.

And that is why any school which acquires academy freedoms will continue to be governed by admissions rules which guarantee fair access to all, safeguards the inclusive character of comprehensive schools, ensures all schools take their fair share of pupils in need, and prevents any school discriminating in any way against those pupils with special educational needs.

Within the safeguards provided by these assurances I believe innovation can flourish. New approaches to the curriculum, to assessment, to discipline and behaviour, to pastoral care, to careers guidance, to sport, the arts and music, new ways of gathering data on pupil performance, new ways of supporting teachers to improve their practice, new ways of tackling entrenched illiteracy and the tragic culture of low expectations which blights so many white working class communities.

And this culture of innovation, I believe, has the potential to benefit all our children.

Earlier this month, Mike Gibbons of the Richard Rose Federation, wrote an article for the TES which encapsulated my vision.

More autonomous schools, he wrote, had in the past been

'...perceived as 'educational lifeboats' to allow highly capable and driven parents to leave the main system.'

But, he argued, that the move to greater autonomy could in fact move our schools system in the opposite direction. More autonomous schools could, should, and in my view will, be tugboats adding extra pull to the drive to increase universal standards, not innovations dragging much-needed resources away from the fleet.

He then concluded by saying that:

If we can develop schools to become crucibles of innovation on behalf of the whole system, working for the sake of all children as well as meeting the needs of parents who are seeking different provision, then the sum continues to be greater than the parts. And so every school, regardless of its status, works for itself and for the whole system.

Mike is himself another example of an inspirational school leader.

He is also, of course, spot on.

Whole system improvement, a comprehensive approach to driving up standards for every child, is what the coalition Government aims to deliver.

Central to that drive is structural reform of the kind I've laid out - professionals liberated to drive improvement across the system.

Improving teaching

But the success of that model is not the only example of good practice here in England we want to spread more widely, it's not the only lesson from abroad we want to implement more urgently here.

We also want to take urgent action to attract more great teachers into the classroom. We want to further enhance the prestige and esteem of the teaching profession and further improve teacher training and continuous professional development.

Look at the highest performing nations in any measure of educational achievement and they are always, but always, those with the most highly qualified teachers. Whether its Singapore, South Korea or Finland, as Sir Michael Barber has pointed out in his ground-breaking study for McKinsey nothing matters more in education than attracting the best people into teaching and making sure that every minute in the classroom is spent with children benefiting from the best possible instruction.

The generation of teachers currently in our schools is the best ever, but given the pace of international improvement we must always be striving to do better.

That is why we will expand organisations such as Teach First, Teaching Leaders and Future Leaders which have done so much to attract more highly talented people into education.

That is why we will write off the student loan payments of science and maths graduates who go into teaching.

That is why we will reform teacher recruitment to ensure there is a relentless focus on tempting the best into this, most rewarding, of careers.

And that is why we will reform teacher training to shift trainee teachers out of college and into the classroom.

We will end the arbitrary bureaucratic rule which limits how many teachers can be trained in schools, shift resources so that more heads can train teachers in their own schools, and make it easier for people to shift in mid-career into teaching.

Teaching is a craft and it is best learnt as an apprentice observing a master craftsman or woman. Watching others, and being rigorously observed yourself as you develop, is the best route to acquiring mastery in the classroom. Which is why I also intend to abolish those rules which limit the ability of school leaders to observe teachers at work. Nothing should get in the way of making sure we have the best possible cadre of professionals ready to inspire the next generation.

opposition.

That is why I will also reform the rules on discipline and behaviour to protect teachers from abuse, from false allegations, from intimidation and violence. The biggest single barrier to good people starting, or staying, in education is poor pupil behaviour and we have a relentless focus on tackling this issue. That means getting parents to accept their responsibility, giving teachers the discretion they need to get on with the job and sending a clear and consistent message at all times that adult authority has to be respected - every child is expected to have their chance.

As well as giving teachers more control over their classrooms I want to give them more control over their careers, developing a culture of professional development which sees more teachers acquiring postgraduate qualifications like masters and doctorates, more potential school leaders acquiring management qualifications and more support in place for those who want, quickly, to climb up the career ladder. In every single one of these areas the role of the National College will be crucial and I hope we can all work ever more closely together.

Investing in the workforce is one crucial lesson of great education systems, alongside granting your leaders greater autonomy. But there are others which we are also determined to push forward.

More intelligent accountability

The best school systems generate rich quantities of data which enable us all to make meaningful comparisons, learn from the best, identify techniques which work and quickly abandon ideologies which don't. In America, President Obama, the Gates Foundation, the top charter schools and the principal education reformers all recognise the need for richer, timelier, more in-depth data about performance.

That is why we need to keep rigorous external assessment, improve and refine our tests, yes, but there can be no going back to the secret garden when public and professionals were in ignorance about where success had taken root and where investment had fallen on stony ground.

Indeed I want to see more data generated by the profession to show what works, clearer information about teaching techniques that get results, more rigorous, scientifically-robust research about pedagogies which succeed and proper independent evaluations of interventions which have run their course. We need more evidence-based policy making, and for that to work we need more evidence.

And that also means a new role for Ofsted. I want to see an inspection regime which also mirrors the approach of the world's most successful systems. Intervention should be in inverse proportion to success. The best needed only the lightest touch to continue on a course of improvement. Those who are struggling need closer attention. That is why we will direct Ofsted's resources to those schools which are faltering, or coasting, and insist that inspectors spend more time on classroom observation and assessing teaching and learning than having their attention diverted to other, strictly peripheral, areas.

Curriculum and qualifications

There is one other area where I also want us to learn from abroad, indeed to compare ourselves as we have never done before. And that is with our curriculum and qualifications.

I want to ensure our national curriculum is a properly international curriculum - that it reflects the best collective wisdom we have about how children learn, what they should know and how quickly they can grow in knowledge.

I want to use the evidence from those jurisdictions with the best-structured and most successful curricula - from Massachusetts to the Pacific Rim - to inform our curriculum development here.

I want to remove everything unnecessary from a curriculum that has been bent out of shape by the weight of material dumped there for political purposes, I want to prune the curriculum of over-prescriptive notions of how to teach and how to timetable. Instead I want to arrive at a simple core, informed by the best international practice, which can act as a benchmark against which schools can measure themselves and parents ask meaningful and informed questions about progress.

And alongside curriculum reform informed by evidence I want exam reform sustained by evidence. I want to ensure our qualifications can stand comparison with the most stretching in the world. I want to ensure that the maths tests our 11-year-olds sit are comparable with those 11-year-olds in Singapore sit and the science qualifications 16 or 18-year-olds acquire here are directly comparable with those in Taiwan or Toronto. That is why I want Ofqual to work not just to guarantee exam standards over time, but to guarantee exam standards match the best in the world.

Conclusion

I won't deny for a moment this is an ambitious agenda. But I don't think there's any point being in politics, fighting elections, seeking office unless you're ambitious to make a difference.

And if there's any audience I can confess to ambition in front of, it's you. Every day your nurture it, encourage it, celebrate it. You're ambitious for your schools, for the young people in your care, for the students they will become. You want them to be pushed, nudged, cajoled, encouraged, tempted and inspired to do more than they ever thought possible. And you want them to rejoice in knowing they have achieved their full potential.

And that is what I want too. In the relentless drive to help every child achieve everything of which they are capable there can be neither rest nor tranquillity. But there can be the endless satisfaction of seeing the human spirit ennobled and fulfilled. That is the task you have been called to lead. And it is my job to serve you.

Published 25 November 2010

Ambition → of systems
→ leaders.

NOT children as agents (top p.2).

Opposition ⁽¹⁰⁾ Parents {beh vs Teachers
Pupils (+ recruitment protection)

systems + leaders ⁽¹⁰⁾ bureaucracy
(Prussian e.g. Finland e.g.)

BUT mentions systems 23x and
school 83x

↓ Power + control.

Autonomy ⁽¹²⁾
Free (dom) ⁽¹²⁾

↓ AGENCY
@ SCHOOL
LEVEL.

(Agency @ pupil
level. 5x pupil
18x children)
x young
people.

Connotations - prescriptive
- lifeboats

Health/ - sick man
moral - fracture
- shaming

Craft / mastery

Economy - capital
- harness

Waste (moral) - squander - shame
- criminal (?)

Time and waste. - accelerate

Comparables - international

- gaps
- before vs.
after.

(Running) race - pace - rowed back
- accelerate - wasting.

Absences

Race (Black x 1 rich +
White x 3 poor).

ethnicity x 1...
↳ ensure all schools
have fair share

(NE) Uncompromising (p.3)

WUPP for race

gap (p.4)

Passive p.3, p.4

Academics & (Pa) choice

! 2 Make ~~opportunities~~ opportunities more
equal

optimist(ic/ism).⁽²⁾ thank.
 innovation⁽⁸⁾ engine
 (culture of...) progress⁽³⁾
 elite⁽¹⁾ radical⁽⁶⁾
 crucible⁽¹⁾ scope.⁽²⁾
 improve(ment)⁽²⁶⁾ impact⁽³⁾ high⁽¹⁴⁾ success⁽¹⁴⁾
 ambition⁽⁵⁾ opportunity⁽¹⁾ assess⁽¹⁾ achieve⁽⁸⁾ data.⁽⁵⁾
 potential⁽³⁾ intelligent⁽²⁾ faller⁽³⁾ attain⁽³⁾ standard⁽⁵⁾
 philos.⁽¹⁾ fail⁽¹⁾ [time]⁽³⁾ minute⁽¹⁾ impatient⁽¹⁾
 profession(al).⁽¹⁾ duty⁽¹⁾ rigorous⁽²⁾ relentless⁽⁴⁾ test⁽³⁾ day⁽²⁾
 liberate⁽²⁾ collab.⁽³⁾ craft⁽¹⁾ talent⁽²⁾
 bureaucracy.⁽⁶⁾ choice.⁽⁴⁾ apprentice⁽¹⁾ journey⁽¹⁾
 account(able/ility)⁽⁴⁾ moral⁽⁶⁾ master⁽³⁾ lead⁽²⁾
 autonomy⁽¹²⁾ (operational) power⁽⁵⁾ instruction.⁽¹⁾ academic⁽¹⁾
 free⁽¹⁴⁾ freedom⁽⁸⁾ regimented⁽¹⁾ evidence⁽⁴⁾ opposite⁽¹⁾
 discretion⁽¹⁾ rigid⁽¹⁾ what works⁽¹⁾ knowledge.
 educational lifeboats.⁽¹⁾ compar(e/able/ison).⁽⁷⁾
 expectations⁽²⁾ destiny⁽¹⁾ curriculum⁽¹²⁾ structure.⁽²⁾
 (low)⁽¹⁾ to m(p)licate.⁽²⁾ policy⁽⁷⁾ lesson⁽³⁾
 (high)⁽¹⁾ expectat⁽²⁾ school⁽³⁵⁾ class(room)⁽⁴⁾
 academy(ies).⁽⁹⁾ community(ies)⁽²⁾
 ofsted⁽²⁾ inspect(ion/or/egime).⁽¹¹⁾ I⁽⁴⁻⁵⁾ Pa⁽⁹⁾
 System⁽²³⁾ our⁽³⁾ we⁽⁴⁻⁹⁾ Chin⁽¹⁸⁾
 Each to the system.
 (Whole system).⁽³⁾ bur(eau)crat⁽¹⁾ leaders.⁽¹⁴⁾
 family(ies)⁽¹⁾ HT⁽⁵⁾ professional⁽⁶⁾ heads.⁽³⁾

ed content

- Michael Gove speaks about the future of education reform (government/speeches/michael-gove-speaks-about-the-future-of-education-reform)

Explore the topic

- School curriculum (education/school-curriculum)
- Inspection and performance of schools (education/inspection-and-performance-of-schools)
- Teaching and leadership (education/teaching-and-leadership)

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comparative⁽⁴⁰⁾ - est. best.
 magic culture of low expect.⁽¹⁾
 disadvantage⁽²⁾ challenged⁽²⁾ comprehensive⁽²⁾
 deprived.⁽²⁾ class⁽²⁾ consistency/consistent⁽¹⁾
 gap⁽⁵⁾ poverty⁽¹⁾ personalised⁽¹⁾
 rich⁽³⁾ side man.⁽¹⁾ fracture⁽¹⁾ race⁽⁶⁾ black⁽¹⁾
 poor⁽³⁾ segregate⁽¹⁾ weak⁽²⁾ ethnicity⁽¹⁾ white⁽³⁾
 diversity⁽³⁾ social mobility⁽²⁾ asian⁽⁶⁾ (relating to race)
 inclusion.⁽¹⁾ justice⁽¹⁾ see justice⁽¹⁾ background.⁽²⁾
 background⁽²⁾ strategy⁽¹⁾ minority⁽¹⁾
 rules⁽⁴⁾ (relating to) support.⁽⁵⁾ abuse.⁽¹⁾
 discipline⁽³⁾ culture⁽⁸⁾ violence⁽¹⁾
 behaviour⁽²⁾ (beh) respect⁽³⁾ sum.⁽¹⁾
 (good)⁽⁶⁾ responsibility(ies)⁽¹⁾ harness.⁽¹⁾ capital⁽¹⁾
 (poor)⁽⁶⁾ respected⁽²⁾ economic waste (intellectual)
 strict.⁽⁶⁾ pastoral⁽²⁾ scandalous⁽¹⁾
 no excuses.⁽²⁾ authority⁽¹⁾ sallowander.
 disruption⁽¹⁾ afford.
 spent/spend (ing)

Appendix 4: The DfE's explicit and tacit references to White saviourism in the eligible "no excuses" website content

Text code	Author (text type, date)	Presence of direct or indirect discursive reference to White saviourism
[2]	Michael Gove (Speech, 25 November 2010)	Moral purpose and saving: helping children take 'charge of their own destinies'; creating 'amazing engines of social mobility' and sending 'children from ghetto areas to elite universities'; saving with 'educational lifeboats' and 'tugboats'.
		Religious zeal and proselytising: teaching as a calling with 'the endless satisfaction of seeing the human spirit ennobled and fulfilled'; being part of a 'moral crusade' and having 'a driving, crusading, vision at the heart of our Government's education policy'.
[5]	Michael Gove (Press release, 4 April 2011)	Hero celebration: celebrating an appointment of 'a new Expert Adviser on Behaviour' with 'a track record in radically improving behaviour in some of the most troubled schools'.
		Religious zeal and proselytising: the tacit allusion to Noah's flood where school leaders and policymakers 'need to clear the decks' to stop 'drowning under the weight of all the guidance and regulations' and 'the raft of things' heads need to do, specifically relating to behaviour policy.
[6]	Michael Wilshaw (Press release, 9 February 2012)	Moral purpose and saving: Headteachers' 'moral purpose' to 'close the gap in educational outcomes between the richest and the poorest'.
		Religious zeal and proselytising: urging headteachers to 'adopt a no excuses culture' and 'step up to the plate to support less successful schools'; urgent imperative for radical change or 'we will see more social and economic division in this country'.
[7]	Michael Gove (Speech, 11 January 2012)	Hero celebration: invoking Abraham Lincoln as a heroic social justice oriented leader; celebrating
		Religious zeal and proselytising: advocating 'emancipating the strong' to 'support the weak; alluding to ideologies led by 'doctrine'; invoking the soul, liberation, emancipation and a sense of 'crime against humanity'; alluding to a crusade by referring to 'ideologies' and 'enemies' (who are referred to three times and using straw man arguments) who need to be 'defeated' and alluding to 'onslaught', 'threat' and 'attack' (used four times).
[8]	Michael Gove (Speech, 26 March 2012)	Moral purpose and saving: a mission that 'isn't just business, it's personal'; 'pressing ahead with our reform programme' because 'we cannot allow children to suffer'.
		Hero celebration: highlighting a "no excuses" 'magnificent seven' who prove 'every single day of their lives - that deprivation need not be destiny'; celebrating the 'best generation' of 'young teachers' and 'heads'; offering references to Martin Luther King as a model and Michael Wilshaw's heroic qualities.
		Religious zeal and proselytising: 'it's a sin not to do everything in your power' for children to 'transcend the circumstances of their

Text code	Author (text type, date)	Presence of direct or indirect discursive reference to White saviourism
		birth'; overcoming those who have 'succumbed to the terrible temptation of fatalism'; allusion to Islam through the 'five pillars of reform'; alluding to a crusade and war through reference to 'enemy', 'allies', 'rationing' and 'defeating'.
[9]	Michael Gove (Press release, 25 March 2014)	Moral purpose and saving: the government as a paternalistic hero, not afraid to demonstrate their 'determination to get tough on bad behaviour'.
[10]	Michael Wilshaw (Speech, 15 October 2015)	Moral purpose and saving: wielding the 'key to unlocking the potential of children and young people'; overcoming 'despair and fatalism'.
		Hero celebration: giving 'credit' and 'paying heartfelt tribute to' leaders who are 'improving the life chances of young people up and down the country'; recognising the heroic tendencies of 'standing firm', refusing 'to accept the status quo', fighting, 'not afraid to challenge'.
		Religious zeal and proselytising: speaking with a sermon-like quality by asking rhetorical (strawman) questions such as 'As a leader, are you standing firm against the insidious anti-learning, low aspiration culture that often pervades non-immigrant communities in this country?' and referring to the tribalism of '[t]he pride and passion that we see every weekend on your football terraces'; alluding to medieval torture by 'holding the feet of officers and headteachers to the fire'.
[11]	Nick Gibb (Speech, 12 November 2015)	Moral purpose and saving: giving 'all children [...] the chance to succeed irrespective of birth or background';
		Hero celebration: praising Lord Adonis and those with a 'strong alternative vision' who can take 'this vision from words on a page, to the bricks and mortar of a school'.
		Religious zeal and proselytising: reference to 'orthodoxy', autonomy being 'reborn', having visions and being 'bound by a philosophical and pedagogical vision'; allusions to proselytising through 'founders' and expressing desire for 'improvements to cascade', especially referencing King Solomon Academy (itself eponymously biblical) as a seed.
[12]	Nick Gibb (Speech, 26 January 2016)	Hero celebration: being 'a great admirer' of 'exceptional individuals' and private benefactors; highlighting high-profile "no excuses" schools and their leaders, such as King Solomon Academy and Max Haimendorf, Michaela Community School and its head Katherine Birbalsingh and other 'inspirational' teachers 'whose pupils achieve previously inconceivable feats; highlighting the heroic tendencies of 'brave and free-thinking school leaders' with 'admirable disregard for the way in which English schools are normally operated' despite not being 'superhuman'; reference to Winston Churchill.
		Religious zeal and proselytising: reference to 'orthodoxies' (referred to four times) and 'dogma' and leaders' need to 'plough their own furrow'.
[13]	Nicky Morgan (Speech,	Moral purpose and saving: highlighting the 'moral purpose' to 'combat [...] low expectations, poor behaviour and dumbing down'

Text code	Author (text type, date)	Presence of direct or indirect discursive reference to White saviourism
	24 February 2016)	and the 'soft bigotry of low expectations'; a personal mission for 'social justice'. Hero celebration: celebrating founders of schools such as Clive Bourne (and his legacy) and Max Haimendorf; promoting the heroism in "no excuses" and school reform though direct reference to five schools, four founders and entrepreneur, and seven private corporate organisations. Religious zeal and proselytising: alluding to a 'mission' and a crusade through 'combat' and 'frontline'; proselyting by asking for more private benefactors and their 'friends and colleagues to come forward'.
[14]	Nick Gibb (Speech, 9 May 2016)	Hero celebration: celebrating King Solomon Academy and Max Haimendorf, Michaela Community School and Katherine Birbalsingh, both schools being case studies of 'extraordinary success stories, forcing all of us to revise our expectations'; promoting their heroic characteristics of being 'unapologetically strict and demanding' and having an 'admirable disregard for the way in which English schools are normally operated'.

Appendix 5: The DfE's overt references to specific "no excuses" organisations and key policy actors in their eligible "no excuses" texts

Organisation/ policy actor	Presence of organisation or policy actor in the eligible DfE content (by text)														
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]	[8]	[9]	[10]	[11]	[12]	[13]	[14]	Sum
Michaela Community School, Wembley											✓			✓	2
Katherine Birbalsingh; Principal, Michaela Community School												✓		✓	2
Joe Kirby; co-founder, Michaela Community Academy														✓	1
Katie Ashford; leader Michaela Community Academy														✓	1
King Solomon Academy (Ark), Wembley							✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Max Haimendorf; Principal, King Solomon Academy												✓	✓	✓	3
Bruno Reddy; maths teacher, King Solomon Academy												✓			1
Ark Schools							✓						✓		2
Ark Burlington Danes Academy, Hammersmith		✓					✓								2
Ark Walworth Academy, Southwark							✓								1
Mossbourne Community Academy, Hackney		✓					✓						✓	✓	4

Organisation/ policy actor	Presence of organisation or policy actor in the eligible DfE content (by text)														
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]	[8]	[9]	[10]	[11]	[12]	[13]	[14]	Sum
Sir Clive Bourne, founder of Mossbourne Community Academy													✓		1
Harris Federation							✓								1
Philip Harris, Baron Harris of Peckham; founder of Harris Federation													✓		1
Pimlico Academy, Westminster					✓			✓							2
Jerry Collins; former head of Pimlico Academy					✓			✓							2
The City Academy, Hackney														✓	1
London Academy of Excellence, Stratford														✓	1
Manchester Academy							✓								1
Haberdashers' Aske Hatcham, Lewisham							✓								1
Monson Primary School, Lewisham							✓								1
Charlie Taylor; former DfE Expert Advisor on Behaviour					✓										1
Sir Michael Wilshaw; former Chief Inspector of Schools		✓				n/a	n/a	✓		n/a				✓	3
Tom Bennett; co-founder, ResearchEd and lead behaviour advisor to the DfE														✓	1
Rob Peal; teacher, West London Free School; former policy advisor and														✓	1

Organisation/ policy actor	Presence of organisation or policy actor in the eligible DfE content (by text)														
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]	[8]	[9]	[10]	[11]	[12]	[13]	[14]	Sum
speech writer for Nick Gibb															
Cabot Learning Federation												✓			1
Teach First		✓												✓	2
KIPP							✓								1
Patricia Sowter; head of Cuckoo Hall Academy, Edmonton								✓							1
Thomas Jones Primary, North Kensington								✓							1

Appendix 6: Examples of crusading, militaristic discourses in the eligible DfE texts

Text code	Author (text type, date)	Presence of direct or indirect discursive reference to crusading, militaristic discourses
[2]	Michael Gove (Speech, 25 November 2010)	Harold Wilson once said of the Labour Party, it is a moral crusade or it is nothing. Well, whatever view one takes of the Labour Party's history, I believe that we have to ensure there is a driving, crusading , vision at the heart of our Government's education policy. Or we will forfeit our mandate.
[5]	Michael Gove (Press release, 4 April 2011)	Improving discipline is a big priority. Teachers can't teach effectively and pupils can't learn if schools can't keep order. These changes will give teachers confidence that they can remove disruptive pupils and search children where necessary. The appointment of a head of Charlie Taylor's calibre shows how serious we are about dealing with this issue. He has an excellent track record in improving discipline in some of the most challenging schools in the country. Teachers have a legal power to use reasonable force. They can use force to remove a pupil who is disrupting a lesson or to prevent a child leaving a classroom.
[7]	Michael Gove (Speech, 11 January 2012)	Some, however, are being obstructive. They are putting the ideology of central control ahead of the interests of children. They are more concerned with protecting old ways of working than helping the most disadvantaged children succeed in the future. Anyone who cares about social justice must want us to defeat these ideologues and liberate the next generation from a history of failure. Some academies (so the argument runs) may get good results, but that's only because they're Gradgrindian exam factories. Creativity, child development, citizenship, wellbeing, and even fun are all being sacrificed to make way for merciless and unrelenting rote learning as part of an ideological push for retrograde Victorianism. It's all about kings, dates, lunchtime detentions, and braid on blazers. I am an enemy of all the forces of social stagnation. And there are no better allies to have in defeating those forces than all of you. It is to defeating those forces that I know all your amazing hard and tireless work is dedicated - for which I thank you. But the sad truth is that, for some of these critics, the facts don't matter much. And they'll continue to view the spread of autonomy as an unwelcome onslaught. They'll continue to talk about the Government 'threatening' schools with academy conversion. A common attack is that our reforms - those that focus on school autonomy in particular - are experimental, untested and untried. When they can't attack the popularity of the programme, and when they can't attack the what's being achieved, the critics move on to something more subtle: they attack the culture. The same ideologues who are happy with failure - the enemies of promise - also say you can't get the same results in the inner cities as the leafy suburbs so it's wrong to stigmatise these schools.

Text code	Author (text type, date)	Presence of direct or indirect discursive reference to crusading, militaristic discourses
[8]	Michael Gove (Speech, 26 March 2012)	I am an enemy of all the forces of social stagnation. And there are no better allies to have in defeating those forces than all of you. It is to defeating those forces that I know all your amazing hard and tireless work is dedicated - for which I thank you.
[10]	Michael Wilshaw (Speech, 15 October 2015)	Why have so few of the high performing and well respected academy chains gained a foothold in this region? Have you perhaps been resistant to change and slow to embrace challenge from beyond the regional education establishment? Whilst you ponder that one, here are a few more questions for you to consider. As a leader, are you standing firm against the insidious anti-learning, low aspiration culture that often pervades non-immigrant communities in this country? Are you the type of leader who refuses to accept the status quo or cultural norms and, indeed, fights against them? The type of leader who doesn't worry that confiscating mobile phones or banning chewing gum could infringe human rights? The type of leader who is not afraid to challenge those parents who refuse to support the school? Or are you what I call a cultural appeaser, more inclined to concede than challenge accepted norms? The type of leader, for example, who won't allow children to take textbooks home because you don't trust them to bring them back the next day? The type of leader who walks into a classroom and nothing much changes, even when the youngsters are misbehaving? The type of leader who uses the phrase 'behaviour management' rather than 'school discipline' because you believe a child's conduct is something that always has to be negotiated? Certainly political backing at both a national and local level is an important ingredient in driving up standards. Elected leaders like Jules Pipe, the Mayor of Hackney, have been instrumental in raising school standards across London by holding the feet of officers and headteachers to the fire and maintaining a clear focus on the achievement of the most disadvantaged pupils.
[11]	Nick Gibb (Speech, 12 November 2015)	In the current year we have allocated over £1.4 million to the recruitment of high-calibre people to govern schools and MATs . We have also allocated £2 million to the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) to provide training for chairs, governors and clerks.
[12]	Nick Gibb (Speech, 26 January 2016)	In the current year we have allocated over £1.4 million to the recruitment of high-calibre people to govern schools and MATs.
[13]	Nicky Morgan (Speech, 24 February 2016)	This combination of moral purpose and business acumen led to the creation of a school which would combat the low expectations, poor behaviour and dumbing down that had so long been synonymous with inner-city schools.

Appendix 7: Examples of expansionist discourses in the eligible DfE texts

Text code	Author (text type, date)	Presence of direct or indirect discursive reference to expansionist discourses
[8]	Michael Gove (Speech, 26 March 2012)	The head there, Kevin Barratt, became a teacher after a successful career in consulting engineering - something that has proved useful in helping design the new buildings he has delivered for his school in record time. I was intrigued as to why Kevin had left one high-paying profession for another profession and why, having become a teacher, he wanted to become a head. "Simple, really" he replied. "I wanted to help children. And being a head gave me the chance to help more children."
		On human capital - we must continue the trend we've seen over the last fifteen years of recruiting more talented people into teaching -no education system can be better than its teachers.
[11]	Nick Gibb (Speech, 12 November 2015)	In previous decades, those who were critics of the prevailing trends of English education had to remain exactly that - critics. If you had a strong alternative vision for what English state schools should look like, there was no outlet for taking this vision from words on a page, to the bricks and mortar of a school. Today, with free schools and academies, the situation is entirely different. We now have an education sector that contains within it the source of its own improvement.
		As such effective approaches to schooling become better known, we can expect improvements to cascade through the English education system. I will give one small example of how this is already happening. The head of King Solomon Academy introduced a rather unusual idea into his lunch hall when the school was founded in 2009: family dining.
[12]	Nick Gibb (Speech, 26 January 2016)	King Solomon Academy is now able to spread its means of success to the 34 other schools within its multi-academy trust , Ark Schools. Unsurprisingly, school leaders are clammering at the doors to visit King Solomon Academy.
		So my challenge to The Key, and any organisation of a similar nature, is to ask yourselves whether you are comforting schools by reflecting current orthodoxies, or challenging schools to improve by promoting approaches which have been proven to work.
		The National Professional Qualifications are now delivered by schools and other providers, allowing aspirant heads to train on the ground with serving headteachers . Some of our leading teaching schools and MATs have embraced this opportunity to create new leadership development organisations , such as Inspiring Leaders, Taudheedul Education and Cabot Learning Federation .
		Programmes such as these act as a pipeline for young, aspirant heads who want to gain leadership responsibility, and are keen to do so in those schools that need them most. So far, high potential senior leaders has provided training to 667 assistant and deputy headteachers, helping them to secure and excel in their first headship position.

Text code	Author (text type, date)	Presence of direct or indirect discursive reference to expansionist discourses
		We have funded other targeted programmes to develop excellent leaders for challenging schools, such as high-potential senior leaders, currently delivered by Future Leaders (http://www.future-leaders.org.uk/), and high-potential middle leaders, currently delivered by Teaching Leaders (http://www.teachingleaders.org.uk/). A great privilege of having served as Schools Minister in 2 successive governments has been meeting inspiring headteachers. In particular, I have been deeply impressed by those heads who have grasped the opportunities offered by today's era of school autonomy to make a clean break with the current orthodoxies of how schools should be run, and plough their own furrow.
[13]	Nicky Morgan (Speech, 24 February 2016)	Speak to others involved in the academies programme, and they will all tell you of the immense fulfilment that comes from taking the skills and knowledge gained in other walks of life, and applying them to improving our schools system. There are 2 clear ways that I am asking you to come forward and play a role in the renewal of England's education system: As a fully-fledged sponsor directly involved in the running of schools following the example set by organisations like Dixons, BAE and Rolls Royce or Lord Harris of Peckham and Ian Livingstone of Games Workshop. Or, as a non-exec director on the board of a multi-academy trust through our Academy Ambassadors programme. As a non-exec you will push existing trusts to succeed and give them vital advice and support. We've already placed 150 business leaders on boards in this way but the team are ready to place hundreds more. Ladies and gentlemen we now have a system with academic rigour at its core; with the freedom for teachers and school leaders to innovate; with new qualifications that are pegged to the highest-performing nations in the world; and with higher levels of numeracy and literacy than ever before. With exceptional heads and principals, excellent teaching practice and business leaders and British institutions doing their bit - we cannot fail. When our education system is able to unlock the true potential of every child, Britain will realise its true potential as a nation. So let's - all of us - commit to making that a reality. This combination of moral purpose and business acumen led to the creation of a school which would combat the low expectations, poor behaviour and dumbing down that had so long been synonymous with inner-city schools. [...] Named after Clive's father Moss, Mossbourne is now one of the best schools in the country, sending a steady stream of pupils every year from east London to Oxbridge and other Russell Group Universities. We have done more than any government before us to bring the best from the outside world into our education system. Inspiring charities, great British institutions and successful businesses are all rolling up their sleeves to get involved in this national mission.

Text code	Author (text type, date)	Presence of direct or indirect discursive reference to expansionist discourses
		You can play an important role in shaping, leading and focusing our schools and colleges, and in helping young people to enter the world of work with the knowledge, skills and character traits that allow them to prosper. I know that many of you here today are already involved and I can't thank you enough - but we need more of you and your friends and colleagues to come forward. With exceptional heads and principals, excellent teaching practice and business leaders and British institutions doing their bit - we cannot fail.
[14]	Nick Gibb (Speech, 9 May 2016)	Only during the late eighties, with the arrival of what became known as the 'local management of schools', could school hire staff as they saw fit. Only then did decisive and strong school leadership become a genuine possibility in the state sector. As a result of a cohort of some of the best teachers we've ever had in the state sector, 1.4 million more pupils are in 'good' and 'outstanding' schools today compared to 2010. We have a generation of Teach First alumni and other teachers who are challenging prevailing education orthodoxies. People like Joe Kirby, Katie Ashford and Rob Peal. Crucial to a policy of school autonomy is, of course, having enough school leaders with the right skills and experience. For this reason, a significant focus of the white paper that we published in March is on improving the quality of school leadership within our schools (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/educational-excellence-everywhere) You may have noticed that when I earlier listed exemplar schools which visitors are keen to visit, they were all in London. Of course, there are excellent schools in all parts of the country, but we are keenly aware of the existence of cold and hot spots in school improvement. Good leaders are indispensable for turning schools around, but tempting good leaders to schools in areas of historic underperformance is an ongoing challenge. For this reason, we are launching an Excellence in Leadership Fund, which will offer the development of innovative programmes to train leaders to work in areas where they are needed most. For ambitious heads who take over failing schools, change cannot occur overnight. Schools run on annual cycles. It has been a disincentive for some leaders taking over underperforming schools, however, that they feel at risk of being judged harshly by Ofsted before they have had time to turn the organisation around. We have invested in a number of programmes which encourage promising young graduates into the profession, or which train promising teachers to take on leadership positions. Teach First (https://www.teachfirst.org.uk/), for example, currently has 2,463 graduates of its programme teaching in UK state schools. Of these, 1 in 3 is already a middle or senior leader, and 18 are headteachers. For bright and ambitious young graduates, a career in teaching now offers rapid advancement opportunities to rival any other profession.

Text code	Author (text type, date)	Presence of direct or indirect discursive reference to expansionist discourses
		And career advancement for teachers does not end with headship. The challenges of running a multi-academy trust demand a whole different set of abilities compared to headship, but equally should offer an exciting new avenue for the brightest and best in the profession to continue progressing throughout their careers. This government will have achieved its aims, if in the years to come, teaching has become established as one of the most exciting and rewarding professions available to young people. We have a profession that is embracing an evidence based approach to the curriculum and pedagogy - new institutions such as Research Ed, founded by Tom Bennett and the Knowledge Network, a grouping of teachers committed to a knowledge rich curriculum. This government's reforms have been the most radical and far reaching since the 1944 Butler Act (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_Act_1944). That's why, on occasion, they attract controversy. Our reforms are designed to deliver more schools like King Solomon; non-selective schools achieving GCSE results that exceed those of many selective independent schools.

Appendix 8: Examples of autonomy, freedom and power discourses in the eligible texts

Text code	Author (text type, date)	Presence of direct or indirect discursive reference to autonomy, freedom and power discourses
[1]	Michael Gove (Authored Article, 7 September 2010)	I'll also give teachers the right to remove disruptive children
[2]	Michael Gove (Speech, 25 November 2010)	Whole system improvement , a comprehensive approach to driving up standards for every child, is what the coalition Government aims to deliver. Central to that drive is structural reform of the kind I've laid out - professionals liberated to drive improvement across the system .
		More autonomous schools , he wrote, had in the past been '...perceived as 'educational lifeboats' to allow highly capable and driven parents to leave the main system.' [...] But, he argued, that the move to greater autonomy could in fact move our schools system in the opposite direction. More autonomous schools could, should, and in my view will, be 'tugboats' adding extra pull to the drive to increase universal standards, not innovations dragging much-needed resources away from the fleet.'
		If you look at the most successful education systems in the world - those with the best absolute performance - and those with the highest levels of equity across classes - they all tend to have certain common features. They extend a high level of autonomy to individual schools . School leaders are empowered to innovate in their own schools. [...] The political leadership is uncompromising in the drive for higher standards. There is a culture of high expectations which does not allow excuses to be made for poor performance on the basis of class, ethnicity or background.
[4]	Nick Gibb (News Story, 14 December 2010)	Reducing the bureaucracy surrounding school behaviour policies allows schools to control their own agendas and apply what works for them in their individual contexts. It is about placing decision making in the hands of those people best placed to make those decisions .
[5]	Michael Gove (Press release, 4 April 2011)	The Government's new guidance is 50 pages long. It clearly sets out the roles and responsibilities for governing bodies, headteachers and teachers regarding behaviour and discipline. It unequivocally restores adult authority to the classroom .
		The new guidance clarifies teachers' powers . It makes clear the following: [...] Teachers have a legal power to use reasonable force . They can use force to remove a pupil who is disrupting a lesson or to prevent a child leaving a classroom. Heads can search for an extended list of items including alcohol, illegal drugs and stolen property. Heads have the power to discipline pupils who misbehave outside the schools premises and outside schools hours.
		The new Education Bill going through the Commons now will also: Extend powers to search pupils for any items that are banned by school rules such as mobile phones.

Text code	Author (text type, date)	Presence of direct or indirect discursive reference to autonomy, freedom and power discourses
[7]	Michael Gove (Speech, 11 January 2012)	And becoming an academy is a liberation . It gives heads real freedom to make a difference. Longer school days; better paid teachers; remedial classes; more personalised learning; improved discipline; innovative curricula - these are just a few of the things that academy heads are doing to give the children in their care the best possible education.
		Some of the autonomy enjoyed by schools like the CTCs, and indeed grant-maintained schools, was eroded after 1997. But the best minds in the last Government knew that was a mistake. And when they were given the chance to shape policy we saw autonomy return and school leaders back in charge . Andrew Adonis knew it was headteachers, not councillors, not ombudsmen, not advisers or consultants, who made schools succeed.
		Research from the OECD and others has shown that more autonomy for individual schools helps raise standards . In its most recent international survey of education, the OECD found that 'in countries where schools have greater autonomy over what is taught and how students are assessed, students tend to perform better.'
[8]	Michael Gove (Speech, 26 March 2012)	So we need to remove one of the biggest barriers to people staying in teaching - poor behaviour and discipline - which we're doing with reforms to make detention simpler, exclusion easier and fairer, attendance easier to police and adult authority unquestioned.
[9]	Michael Gove (Press release, 25 March 2014)	The government has introduced a package of measures to help schools ensure more children attend class, and to give heads and teachers greater powers to tackle bad behaviour .
		Alongside our measures to give teachers powers to search pupils and impose same-day detentions, this demonstrates our determination to get tough on bad behaviour.
[10]	Michael Wilshaw (Speech, 15 October 2015)	As a leader, are you standing firm against the insidious anti-learning, low aspiration culture that often pervades non-immigrant communities in this country?
		Are you the type of leader who refuses to accept the status quo or cultural norms and, indeed, fights against them? The type of leader who doesn't worry that confiscating mobile phones or banning chewing gum could infringe human rights? The type of leader who is not afraid to challenge those parents who refuse to support the school?
[11]	Nick Gibb (Speech, 12 November 2015)	At an event such as this, it is good to give ourselves a sense of perspective about the development of school autonomy. In 1993, around the time this organisation was founded, there were 15 city technology colleges. By 1998, there were around 1,200 grant-maintained schools, though grant-maintained status ended that same year. The idea of school autonomy was of course reborn with the first city academies created by Lord Adonis in 2002, and by 2010 there were 203 academies in England. Since then, our government has been guided by the idea that school autonomy should no longer be a status enjoyed by a select group of schools, but an opportunity for all. Today, there are over 5,000 academies in England, including 65% of all secondary schools, and 18% of primary schools.

Text code	Author (text type, date)	Presence of direct or indirect discursive reference to autonomy, freedom and power discourses
[12]	Nick Gibb (Speech, 26 January 2016)	As our free school and academy reforms mature, I am certain that we will see more and more brave and free-thinking school leaders, such as Max, whose pupils achieve previously inconceivable feats under their charge. Ever since she burst onto the public stage in 2010, I have been a great admirer of Katharine Birbalsingh. She is currently running a free school in Wembley which shows an admirable disregard for the way in which English schools are normally operated. In his memoirs about his own school days, Winston Churchill recalled his old master Dr Welldon, and observed that: 'Headmasters have powers at their disposal with which Prime Ministers have never yet been invested.' And that was before the current era of unprecedented school autonomy.
[14]	Nick Gibb (Speech, 9 May 2016)	It was Winston Churchill, in his memoirs 'My Early Life', who made the observation: 'Headmasters have powers at their disposal with which Prime Ministers have never yet been invested.' Since the arrival of local management of schools, the trend in school reform has been towards greater school autonomy, and greater powers for heads. And this trend has significantly accelerated since 2010. Our government has been guided by the international evidence showing that high levels of school autonomy, coupled with strong accountability, is a consistent feature of the world's top-performing school systems. The historical trend towards school autonomy has not been entirely linear. When I first became Schools Minister in 2010, it was clear that - whilst power had passed from local authorities to schools - the Department for Children, Schools and Families as it was then known, had become addicted to meddling in the minutia of school administration. [...] We took clear and purposeful action to free heads from such meddling. [...] We also removed 21,000 pages of unnecessary school guidance, [...] Needless legislation which constrained the smooth running of schools has been amended, strengthening teachers' powers to discipline pupils [...] At the department, we have worked constructively with Ofsted and Sir Michael Wilshaw to ensure that headteachers are freed to focus on what is best for raising pupil outcomes, and not what is best for pleasing visitors. For headteachers who lead academies, the freedoms are more extensive still. They have more control over their funding, the ability to change term times and the school day, greater freedom over their curriculum, and the freedom to choose where to go to get the best services, such as behaviour support and school improvement. This is because institutions thrive when the people who lead them are actually in charge. Conversely, there is nothing more deflating than being responsible for an organisation over which you do not have adequate control.