

# Race, education and the status quo

What effect has government policy, enacted in education between 1997 and 2017, had on the educational attainment of Black children in London secondary schools and how can this be explained?

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## **Declaration**

I, Nicholas Taylor-Mullings, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Word count: 99,748

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## Abstract

This thesis is an investigation into the effect government policy, enacted in secondary education between 1997 and 2017, has had on the educational attainment of Black<sup>1</sup> children in London. It focuses on the policies enacted by New Labour (1997 to 2010) and the Coalition (2010 to 2015). However, it also refers to the activities of the Conservative administration of 2015 to 2017. It starts from the premise that, following a short upward surge in the attention afforded to race equality at the turn of the century, there has been a de-prioritisation of race as a public policy problem. The central argument is that, despite this less than favourable (if not hostile) public policy environment, it may be the case that the policies enacted by these administrations assisted in improving the educational attainment of Black children. However, it also contends that, whilst it may well be the case that the attainment of Black children improved and racial inequalities were reduced, the policies enacted were not intended to address the underachievement of Black children. Instead, these policies were aimed at responding to the concerns of the White middle class and addressing the institutional self-interests of successive governments and schools. As a result, this thesis concludes that the policies enacted by successive governments during this time led to improvements in the educational attainment of some Black children, but also entrenched institutional racism. This left Black children as a whole further disadvantaged.

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, the term Black will refer to people who identify themselves and/or their children as being Black Caribbean, Black African and Black Other and, therefore, are reflected in government data as such. At the beginning of chapter 2, I discuss in more detail how race and the term Black should be understood within the context of this thesis.

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## 1. Introduction

[T]here is nothing against our coming, for we are British subjects. If there is – is it because we are coloured?

Passenger on Empire Windrush (Cited in The Guardian, 2016.para.12)

I frequently get asked whether life has improved for black Londoners over the 20 years I have been campaigning (...). The straight answer is no, not really. The lives of young black people in London haven't changed a great deal (...). We still have a long way to go in the fight for genuine equality in this great city.

Baroness Doreen Lawrence (Cited in Evening Standard, 2013.para.4-6)

### Context

It is the image of SS Empire Windrush docking in Essex in 1948 that is widely associated with the first arrival of Black people to Britain. However, Black people have lived in Britain for approximately five hundred years and can be traced back to at least the third century AD when a battalion of five hundred Africans guarded Hadrian's Wall near Carlisle. (Fryer, 1984; Newman and Demie, 2006; Hall, 2011). The arrival of Windrush has, therefore, been inaccurately afforded 'originary status' (Hall, 2011:7). Yet, the generation who settled in the United Kingdom (UK) in the late 1940s and 1950s is historically significant. It was this generation who travelled to Britain largely in response to campaigns by government ministers for Black people to fill vacancies in, for example, the London Underground and the National Health Service who were then forced to endure, and indeed resist, unprecedented levels of racism (Phillips and Phillips, 1998; Marr, 2008; Hall, 2011; John, 2015). They were the unwanted 'dark strangers' and 'coloured immigrants' (John, 2015:18) subjected to racism in all areas of their social, economic and political life. In response, they were forced to organise themselves, both formally and informally, against the racial discrimination they faced (Marr, 2008; Hall, 2011; John, 2015). Consequently, the significance

of organisations such as the Coordinating Committee Against Racial Discrimination (CCARD) and the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD) cannot be overstated. For example, the action taken by CARD to eliminate discrimination and campaign against inequalities in immigration policy are illustrations of the struggle for equality that took place (Gilroy, 2006). Equally important were the somewhat informal and spontaneous activist groups that helped shape policy. The young men who confronted the March Against Muggers (an organisation that claimed that 80% of muggers were Black and 85% of victims were White) and those who participated in the uprising in Brixton in 1981 to fight against institutional racism are two of many instances (Scarman, 1982; Phillips and Phillips, 1998; Gilroy, 2006). These groups were organic movements not just brought about in defence of Black people, but to resist the inequalities of the state and society more widely.

One struggle, which has remained consistent throughout this time, and still exists today, is for racial equality in the education system. This issue predates the Windrush generation, but it was not until the 1960s and 1970s, when children began to arrive in increasing numbers, that the problem was first widely identified (Phillips and Phillips, 1998; John, 2006, 2015). The perceived inability of West Indian children to cope with schooling in Britain was an early indication of the institutional racism this generation confronted (ibid). As I refer to later in this thesis, academics such as Bernard Coard (2005) famously raised the problem of racial inequality and its subsequent effect on the educational attainment of Black children. Simultaneously, inspirational work from authors such as Louise Bennett Coverley was crucial in bringing to light the extent of the problem and challenging those who believed Caribbean children were poorly equipped to progress in Britain (John, 2006). These scholars and activists drew attention to the tireless sacrifice of this pioneering generation of Black people who, at the time at least, were told that they belonged to a 'great imperial family' (Her Majesty The Queen, cited in Murphy, 2013:38) of which the UK was its colonial mother country (Marr, 2008). Over time, their struggles have forced governments to act and initiate various public policy responses (including the introduction of several iterations of race equality legislation). However, given the extent of racism in Britain, these policy responses have been inadequate. Yet, even these measures could not have been secured without the endeavours and sacrifices of the Windrush generation.

This gives rise to important questions with regard to the nature of race equality policy in Britain and the circumstances in which it is enacted. For example, does race equality policy solely derive from the protests and sacrifices of the Black community? An examination of the events surrounding the development of race equality policy in this country suggests that moves towards such progress have indeed been born out of public outrage on the part of Black people. Trevor Phillips (2005: no pagination), the then Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, made this very point:

Race equality legislation it seems is always born out of outrage, and all too often tragedy. The 1965 Act came in the wake of the death of the carpenter Kelso Cochrane in Notting Hill, [and] the riots that followed in 1958 (...). The 1976 Act followed the rise of the National Front and street clashes which were later to claim the lives of two young men - Kevin Gately and Blair Peach. And of course the 2000 Amendment Act would never have come about without the death of Stephen Lawrence.

The former Deputy Prime Minister, Michael Heseltine, seemingly made this very point too when he titled his report following the disturbances in Toxteth in 1981 *It Takes a Riot* (Travis, 2011).

Similarly, Gillborn (2005, 2008) argued that some of the most significant policy developments in race and education have been the result of bloodshed:

In England every notable development taking forward antiracist education has arisen in some way as a direct result of action by minoritized people. Often the catalyst for change nationally is a major protest or public injustice, frequently involving bloodshed, even death (Gillborn, 2008:118).

Perhaps the most recent salient uprising in the long history for equality is Black Lives Matter, which began as a social media hashtag and has now grown into an international movement for racial justice (Garza, 2016; Hunt, 2016; Ray et al., 2017; Ray et al., 2017a). The

movement was created in the aftermath of the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin in the United States<sup>2</sup>. According to one of its co-founders, Alicia Garza (2016:23), its emergence was 'a response to the anti-Black racism that permeates our society (...) in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise'.

### **The post-racial fallacy**

Despite the advancements in race equality realised by movements such as these, it is often the case that the gains they achieve are constrained and then, once the initial outrage that has given rise to change has subsided, race equality is de-prioritised as an issue and the progressive measures are reversed (Bell, 1985; Gillborn, 2008; Gillborn et al., 2016; Warmington et al., 2017). For example, subsequent to the Broadwater Farm riot in 1985<sup>3</sup>, Oliver Letwin (the future Conservative Cabinet Minister) and Hartley Booth, who at that time were advisors to Mrs Thatcher, successfully urged the then Prime Minister to reject all arguments that attributed the rioting in inner city areas populated by mainly Black people to social deprivation and racism and cautioned against government investment in social and economic regeneration in those communities in order to combat it. In addition, the release of the Stephen Lawrence Report, which examined the handling of the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence by Metropolitan Police (a document I discuss in more detail in the next chapter) represents a further example. Its publication was supposed to herald a fundamental change in the way in which Black and other ethnic minority people would be treated, but the current state of race equality even forced Theresa May, who was Prime Minister at the time of writing, to recognise that '[i]f you're black, you're treated more harshly by the criminal justice system than if you're white' (May, 2016.para.7). Such an assertion is supported by evidence. For instance, Black people are over 6 times more likely to be stopped by the police

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<sup>2</sup> Trayvon Martin was a 17-year-old African American from Florida who was killed in 2012 by a neighbourhood watchman in what was believed to be an instance of racial profiling that led to his death.

<sup>3</sup> The Broadwater Farm riot was precipitated by the death of Cynthia Jarrett, who died of heart failure following a police raid on her home in October 1985 (the Police stated that they were searching for stolen property, did not find any) and resulted in the murder of PC Blakelock (BBC, 2005).

(Hargreaves et al., 2016). What is more, in 2015/16 police searches fell across all ethnicity groups, but whilst those searches of White individuals fell by the largest amount (38%), those of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) individuals only fell by 13%. In addition, in the same year, Black people made up approximately 3% of the general population, but accounted for 12% of adult prisoners and more than 20% of children in custody. Furthermore, since the publication of the Stephen Lawrence Report there have been at least 93 deaths with a known or suspected racial element in the UK, of which 97% of the victims were from BME communities (Athwal and Burnett, 2014); ethnicity remains the most commonly recorded motivation for hate crime in England and Wales (ibid); Black Caribbean people have the joint highest proportion of 16 to 64-year-olds who are unemployed (ONS, 2013); Black British women are 4 times more likely to be detained under mental health legislation than their White counterparts (EHRC, 2016); Black students are between 6 and 28 percentage points less likely than their White counterparts to be awarded a higher classification degree; and the employment opportunities for Black people are subject to an 'ethnic penalty' (Simpson et al., 2006:1) that leads to poor outcomes (Simpson et al., 2006; Haque, 2017; McGregor-Smith, 2017).

This should not, of course, come as a surprise given that those with power and status in society go to extraordinary lengths to maintain the status quo. The evidence does, however, lead one to question whether any significant progress has been secured following the Stephen Lawrence Report and the subsequent commitments to bring about significant change. Britain today is not the one of 60 years ago when race relations in this country were exemplified by the infamous no Blacks, no dogs, no Irish signs that were commonplace, but as the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has stated, 'the evidence shows that, 50 years after the Race Relations Act 1965, stark inequalities remain' and that 'structural injustices, discrimination and racism continue to be part of our society today' (EHRC, 2016:7). Indeed, the first Black female Member of Parliament (MP), Diane Abbott, has argued that the fight against racism is getting harder and that it is 'silencing minorities' (Abbott, 2017.para.1).

Yet, despite the de-prioritisation of race and the subsequent reversal in public policy advancements that is making progress even more difficult, a ‘post-racial fallacy’ (Gillborn et al., 2016:4) has emerged. What I mean by this is that, despite evidence to the contrary, there is an established view that society has advanced so much so that race is no longer an issue (Gillborn et al., 2016; Warmington et al., 2017). This is certainly the case in relation to race equality policy in education (ibid). Therefore, returning to the question I posed earlier (i.e. does race equality policy solely derive from the protests and sacrifices of the Black community?), the arguments set out above suggests the answer is yes. However, this very short exploration of the issues also leads one to question whether any of the advancements secured from the protests and sacrifices of the Black community have been sustained over time. The arguments set out above give rise to the view that they have not.

### **Race and education**

This evidence led me to consider the state of race equality policy in education subsequent to the publication of the Stephen Lawrence Report. I began by problematising why the education system continues to work to the disadvantage of Black children. In particular, I sought to understand why, over time, Black children at age 16 have underachieved relative to many other ethnic groups. For example, the Youth Cohort Study<sup>4</sup> (Government Statistical Service, 1999) estimated that, in 1998 (the first set of results during the period of time this thesis is concerned with) 46% of all children achieved the then headline performance measure of 5 GCSEs at grade A\* - C<sup>5</sup>, but only 29% of Black children (an inequality of 17%). In 2010 (the final year New Labour was in office) and 2015 (the final year the Coalition was in office) the gap in attainment was around 5%, whilst in the final year of the Conservative government (2015-2017), the gap varied between 2% and 4% and Black children were shown

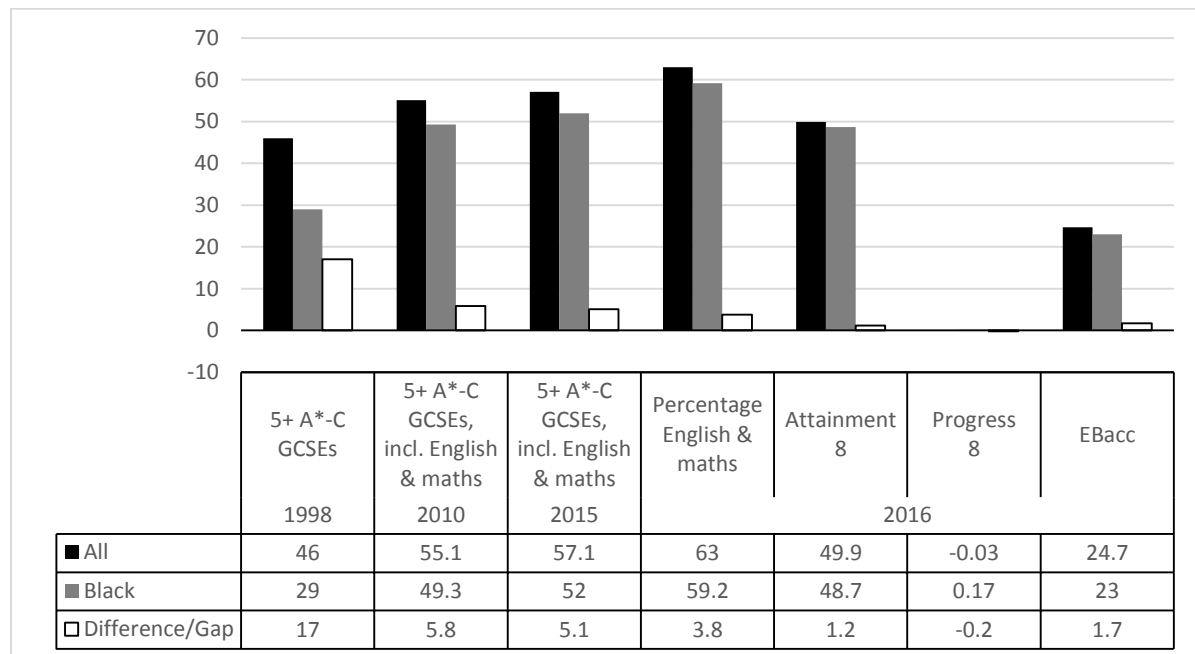
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<sup>4</sup> Due to the poor availability and consistency of data, I have relied on the Youth Cohort Study, but this was a measure of children’s attainment in England and Wales and included private schools, whilst the data I refer to in later years (i.e. 2002 onwards) is only concerned with England.

<sup>5</sup> Whilst some ethnicity based data on educational attainment was available at that time, it was only after the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry that the government required schools and local authorities responsible for education to gather such information. Therefore, the estimates provided by the Youth Cohort Study represent one of the main data sources.

to have made more progress than the national average (see Figure 1 and Figure 2 for further analysis) (DfE, 2017g).

**Figure 1: Headline performance measures, 2016**



**Notes**

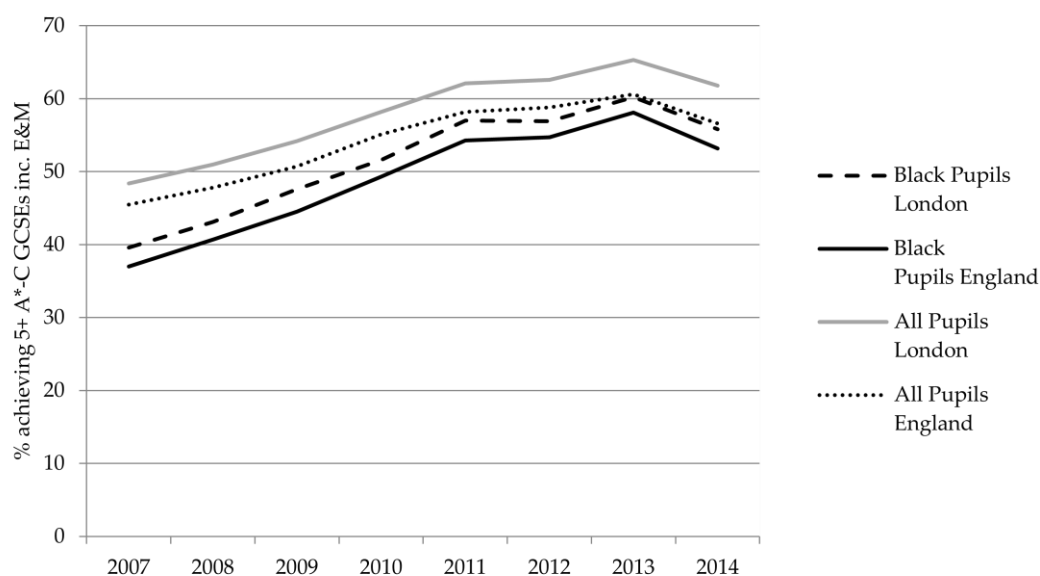
**The English Baccalaureate (EBacc)** was introduced in 2009/10. It is a measure of how many children achieve GCSE grades A\* to C in English, maths, science, a language and history or geography.

**Attainment 8** is a measure of the average attainment of children in up to 8 government approved qualifications. This includes English (which is double weighted if language and literature or the combined English qualification are taken) maths (which is also double weighted) and three further qualifications.

**Attainment in English and maths** is a measure of the percentage of children achieving A\* to C in both English and maths GCSE. In 2015, children were required to achieve an A\* to C in English language and have sat an English literature exam, whilst in 2016 children could achieve the English component by attaining a A\* to C in English language or literature.

**Sources: Government Statistical Service, 1999; DfE, 2017g**

**Figure 2: Percentage of pupils achieving the main attainment indicator: achieving 5+ A\* - C Including English and Mathematics in London in state-funded schools, 2007-2014**



Source: ONS, 2015

There are, of course, several caveats that must be applied to any analysis that seeks to establish the extent of improvements in Black children's attainment. One must, for example, (a) recognise that there have been improvements in attainment of several ethnic groups; (b) consider that, as Gillborn (2016) and Gillborn et al., (2016) identified, ethnic minority groups have not, since the 1980s, always shared equally in the overall increases in attainment as their White counterparts have; and (c) be hesitant in discussions concerning gaps in attainment, which is an issue Gillborn (2008a:240) and then Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2013:589) referred to as 'gap talk' (i.e. giving the false impression of, in this case Black children, making educational progress) and, therefore, mythologising the extent of the improvements they have made.

Whilst conducting the initial research, I therefore took these caveats into consideration and continued to seek to understand why Black children underachieved. However, I still expected the senior leaders and governments officials that I interviewed and the politicians,



senior officials and advisors<sup>6</sup> that I studied to talk about Black children's attainment improving and to do so within the context of policies such as Aiming High: Raising the Achievement of Minority Ethnic Pupils and the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (DfES, 2003), which were policies introduced by New Labour aimed at raising the achievement of this group. Many did indeed refer to these improvements (some even went as far as to mythologise the extent of the progress made). What is more, instead of locating these improvements within the context of the policies I set out above, they referred to school accountability (including performance measures, Ofsted and the general control central government exerts over schools) and policy pressures (such as London Challenge and Academies) as being central to these improvements.

It became clear, therefore, that I had initially failed to give sufficient consideration to establishing (a) why, in the context of race being de-prioritised there have been improvements in the educational attainment of Black children in London (even though I consider the caveats I referred to above to be more important than the participants and the politicians, senior officials and advisors I studied) and (b) the extent of the contribution made to these improvements by the wider policy agenda in education. Therefore, I arrived at the view that (a) if the de-prioritisation of race equality policy and an increase in Black children's educational attainment coexisted, they must be given greater prominence in my thesis and (b) they can only be understood within the context of the wider reform agenda in education. This led to the reformation of the questions that informs the principal research question and sit at the heart of this thesis. They are now as follows:

- A. In the context of the de-prioritisation of race equality as a salient policy problem, why has the attainment of Black children improved?
- B. Have the education policies enacted by successive governments worked to the advantage or detriment of Black children?

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<sup>6</sup> I explain who these individuals were in chapter 4 and Appendix F.

In order to explore these issues, I drew on a body of scholarly work known as Critical Race Theory, particularly the conceptual tool of 'interest convergence' (Bell, 1980:523), which assisted in demonstrating that institutional racism remains 'a fundamental axis of oppression' (Gillborn, 2008:1) in the education system and that public policy that realises improvements in the attainment of Black children are only enacted when those very policies are also in the interests of the White middle class. I also drew on academic literature concerned with neoliberalism. This work was important in explaining policy enactment in London and the impact this may have had on Black children.

### **Policy and enactment**

As this thesis is principally concerned with the effect government policy had on the educational attainment of Black children between 1997 and 2017, it is important to set out what policy means in this context. In order to do so, I have adopted the description offered by Ball et al. (2012:3):

What is meant by policy [is] text and 'things' (legislation and national strategies) but also discursive processes that are complexly configured, mediated and institutionally rendered.

Within the context of this thesis, therefore, policy should be considered as texts, in the form of legislation and other such prescriptions and instruments; strategies, decisions and positions on issues; and practices that may arise from, or indeed inform, operations within an institution such as a school (Ball et al., 2012).

The notion of 'policy as text' and 'policy as discourse' popularised by Ball (1993:10) is useful in this analysis (as will become clear). Ball (1993:11) and Ball et al. (2012:3) argued that the former denotes the way in which policy text is complexly 'encoded' through 'struggles, compromises, authoritative public interpretations and reinterpretations' and 'decoded' through 'actors' interpretations and meanings in relation to their history, experiences, skills,

resources and context' (ibid). This means that policy texts are open to interpretation, 'contested and changing' by multiple authors and a 'plurality of readers' (ibid):

[T]here is plenty of social agency and social intentionality around [policy as text]. Actors are making meaning, being influential, contesting, constructing responses, dealing with contradictions, attempting representations of policy (Ball, 1993:14).

Policy as discourse, however, refers to the way in which text is constrained by taken-for-granted conceptual models of thinking (knowledge and assumptions) and practices:

[W]e need to appreciate the way in which policy ensembles, collections of related policies, exercise power through a production of 'truth' and 'knowledge as discourses' (Ball, 1993:14).

Policy also involves what I refer to in this thesis as enactment. It is a term that I have also fostered from the work of Ball (1993) and Ball et al. (2012). The notion of enactment is not new to the theorisation of race and education. Troyna (1987:307), for example, used the concept in order to describe the various ways in which the issue of race in education (i.e. the treatment of Black children) 'translated into policy statements and provision'. However, in this context enactment should be thought of as a complex process that goes beyond the translation of issues into policy, or the 'decoding and recoding' of policy (Ball et al., 2012:3). It involves the consideration, mediation and action of complex factors:

Enactments are always more than just implementation, they bring together contextual, historic and psychosocial dynamics into a relation with texts and imperatives to produce action and activities that are policy (Ball et al., 2012:71).

Therefore, policy enactment involves 'creative processes of interpretation and recontextualisation' and the 'translation of texts into action and the abstractions of policy ideas into contextualised practices' (Ball et al., 2012:3). In doing so, it join[s] up classrooms with abstract political priorities' (Ball et al., 2012:71).

## **Structure of the thesis**

This thesis comprises of eight chapters. Chapter 1 is concerned with introducing the thesis, setting out the research questions and the issues that led to their formation.

Chapter 2 represents the first substantive section. It draws attention to a summary of the scholarly work I have judged to be most appropriately placed to assist in addressing the issues I set out in chapter 1. It introduces Critical Race Theory and the conceptual tool of ‘interest convergence’ (Bell, 1980:523). In addition, it draws attention to the scholarly work on institutional racism and how it should be understood within the context of this thesis.

Chapter 3 sets out some of the academic literature concerned with neoliberalism. It focuses on the various ways in which successive governments have enacted neoliberal ideas in order to improve public services in England and several of the limitations of the policies it gives rise to.

Chapter 4 sets out the methodological framework for carrying out the fieldwork. It puts forward the rationale, the key questions I explored in the primary research and how and why I used documents to supplement my primary research. It also sets out the advantages and limitations of these methods within the context of this study. In addition, it draws attention to the debate on valid and reliable research methods, the practicalities associated with the primary and secondary research I carried out and my approach to data collection, collation and analysis.

Chapter 5 is the first of three data chapters. It considers the extent to which underachievement amongst Black children was a priority for successive governments and schools. It compares the priority afforded to different social groups and questions the equity of this activity. It also considers why, in terms of education policy, London was prioritised and the impact of this decision and policy activity on Black children’s attainment.

Chapter 6 is concerned with school accountability and the effect it had on the attainment of Black children in London. It considers whether government policy in this area was aimed at (a) raising the standard of education (i.e. the performance of schools as opposed to the results children attained) by making each school more accountable for its own performance and (b) influencing the policies of schools in order to raise standards. As a result, the chapter considers whether school accountability worked to the advantage or disadvantage of Black children in London.

Chapter 7 focuses on the various ways in which schools responded to the policies enacted in London. It extends the arguments made in chapters 6 and 7. It does this by considering whether the policies schools enacted as a result of the school accountability regime and the threat of government intervention led to a focus on raising standards.

Chapter 8 sets out a summary of the main conclusions I reached, the contribution this thesis makes to knowledge, the main limitations of this study and suggests several areas for further research.

## 2. Experiencing Racism

Racism is an integral, permanent, and indestructible component of this society. The challenge throughout has been to tell what I view as the truth about racism without causing disabling despair.

Derrick Bell (1992:ix)

### Introduction

In the introduction, I argued that despite the continued struggles for racial equality the most significant policy advancements in this area appear to have been enacted in response to the outrage and heightened protests and struggles of Black people following a major racist incident. I contended that these circumstances, along with the slow pace of change preceding and subsequent to these events, constrained any improvements in the social, economic and political circumstances of Black people. Subsequently, I focused on education policy and began to consider the impact policy enactment during the period this thesis is concerned with had on the attainment of Black children in London. In this chapter, I explore a body of scholarship known as Critical Race Theory (CRT) in order to assist in explaining these issues. First, I set out how the notion of race and the term Black should be understood within this thesis. Second, I introduce CRT and the main arguments of those who adhere to this theoretical perspective. Third, I explain the conceptual tool of 'interest convergence' (Bell, 1980:523), as it is one of the principal tenets of CRT and represents one of the two main theoretical pillars upon which this thesis sits. Fourth, I set out some of the scholarly work on institutional racism (including how this concept should be understood within the context of this thesis).

### The social construction of race

For many years, scholars have debated the extent to which there is a biological or genetic basis to the notion of race (Schwartz, 2001; Graves, 2004; Keita et al., 2004; Jorde and

Wooding, 2004; Mountain and Risch, 2004; Relethford, 2009). Whilst much of this debate falls outside the scope of this thesis, I want to begin this chapter by briefly explaining why, despite this debate, race remains an important area for investigation. I will then explain how the term Black should be understood within the context of this research.

This thesis starts from the premise that race is the product of social thought, rather than fixed biological or genetic reality (Delgado, 2000; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001, 2012; Graves, 2004; Leonardo, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Warmington et al., 2017). Put simply, the notion of race is 'biologically meaningless' (Schwartz, 2001:1392). Yet, race is a legitimate and necessary area for investigation. For example, Leonard (2005:409) wrote the following:

There is good reason to believe that race is not a scientific concept, which is not reason enough to reject its study but necessitates a multiple framework that includes ideological and materialist perspectives.

This argument is exemplified by the fact that society has constructed and maintained social categories based on outward observable traits, such as pigmentation of one's skin, hair texture, eye shape and lip size, and has used these in the belief that they are defining characteristics that can denote differences along the lines of race (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001, 2012; Graves, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2013). These categories (i.e. races, or what are also often referred to as ethnic groups) have become an important part of the way in which people see themselves and how they are perceived. I want to offer an example in order to illustrate the argument I am seeking to make, which is that the notion of race is biologically meaningless, but is a powerful social and political reality. The photo<sup>7</sup> below (see Figure 3) is

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<sup>7</sup> The photo (Souza, 2009) is of President Barack Obama bending over to all Jacob Philadelphia, the son of a White House staff member, to pat his head. Jacob wanted to see if the President's haircut felt like his own (Calmes, 2012). Writing in the New York time, Jackie Calmes (2012.para.7-13) recited the incident as it was told by the photographer Pete Souza: 'Jacob spoke first. "I want to know if my hair is just like yours," he told Mr. Obama, so quietly that the president asked him to speak again. Jacob did, and Mr. Obama replied, "Why don't you touch it and see for yourself?" He lowered his head, level with Jacob, who hesitated. "Touch it, dude!" Mr. Obama said. As Jacob patted the presidential crown, Mr. Souza snapped. "So, what do you think?" Mr. Obama asked. "Yes, it does feel the same,"

the iconic image of Barack Obama in the Oval Office bending over so that five-year-old Jacob Philadelphia can touch the President's hair.

**Figure 3: Jacob Philadelphia and President Obama in the Oval Office**



Source: Souza, P. (2009)

The status this photo has acquired derives from the fact that Jacob was seeking to validate that, like him, the President is also Black. As Jennifer Springer (2014:8) argued, when Obama invited Jacob to touch his hair, 'his resolve was "it is like mine."' What this illustrates is that Jacob, who is the product of a society constructed around the notion of racial difference, has been taught that one of the ways in which we can validate one's membership of a particular race is through the sameness of one's hair. Therefore, in doing so he is able to confirm that a person just like him was at that time President of the United States of America.

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Jacob said.' Calmes (2012.para.4) argued that the photo represents 'tangible evidence of what polls also show: Mr. Obama remains a potent symbol for blacks'



This may be a matter of conjecture, but it is likely to be the case that a little boy who is Black may consider that if someone of the same racial group as he belongs to can reach high office, it is possible for him to replicate this in the area he chooses to pursue (thus demonstrating the power that race can have on one's identity; particularly given how very few Black role models with a high profile Jacob may have seen).

This example is also pertinent because it illustrates that, despite the scientific inaccuracies that the notion of race is constructed on, society has afforded 'privilege, status and wealth' (Delgado, 2001:2283) based on these socially constructed categories. Someone of Barack Obama's race is seldom afforded such a position in the United States or elsewhere in the West. As a result, this is a representation of the fact that, whilst the traditional scientific concept of race may be a myth, race and racism are social and political realities and, therefore, are of interests to CRT (Bell, 1992; Delgado, 2001; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Smith-Maddox and Solórzano, 2002; Gillborn, 2008; Leonardo, 2009; Rollock, 2012a; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Springer, 2014). As Warmington et al. (2017:3) argued, 'we live as if race has meaning', which means that 'we live race in practice, experiencing the world in ways that are mediated by racialised social categories and relationships' (ibid). Therefore, 'race as a concept is not real, [but] its modes of existence are real' (Leonardo, 2009:41).

It is important, therefore, to clearly set out what I mean by the term Black in the context of this thesis. I am using the term Black to denote people who have classified themselves as Black Caribbean, Black African and Black Other. I do, however, draw on research that has been compiled using alternative definitions. Where it is possible, these variations will be stated. In addition, I accept that the way in which I use the term Black gives rise to issues of authenticity and consistency. For example, the definition of Black that I am using means that I am not intentionally considering the experiences of people who have one parent who is Black (i.e. people who are mixed race). Yet, I accept that they may have similar experiences of the education system and elsewhere as Black people because they are in many instances (although not all) considered Black (King and DaCosta, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Anderson, 2015). Barack Obama is an obvious and very high-profile example (ibid).

Having very briefly discussed the definitional issues in relation to race, I want to turn to the body of work that underpins this thesis, which is CRT.

## **Critical Race Theory**

CRT is 'an iterative project of scholarship and social justice' (Tate, 1997: 235). It was first developed in the field of law as a 'grasp of emancipatory hope that law can serve liberation rather than domination' (West, 1995: xii), but now has a presence in a wide and varied field of academia (Delgado and Stefancic, 2000). Indeed, it is now a 'form of oppositional scholarship' (Taylor, 1998:122) that represents a paradigmatic shift in the debate on race and racism in academic fields such as education (Smith-Maddox and Solórzano, 2002). For example, CRT offers a robust challenge to the experience of White people 'as the normative standard and grounds its conceptual framework in the distinctive experiences of people of color' (Taylor, 2016:122) and, therefore, represents a 'radical inter-disciplinary approach to studying and resisting racial oppression' (Gillborn, 2010a:4). William Tate (1997:206) argued that no date has been attributed to the conception of CRT, but that its emergence is tied to the development of what he described as 'African American thought' in the aftermath of the civil rights era (i.e. the 1970s). CRT emerged as a response to significant economic, political and social change in the United States of America (US), as well as opposition to the unequal and immoral distribution of power, which is based on race and gender, that permeate the world (Tate, 1997; Taylor, 2016). As I will illustrate, there are similarities between the distribution of power along the lines of race in the US and those in the UK. This is not just evident in education but, for example, the criminal justice system, employment and housing.

CRT stems from a critique of Critical Legal Studies (CLS) and the insufficient attention it paid to race (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Lynn et al., 2002; Parker and Lynn, 2002). For example, CRT scholars contend that their CLS counterparts 'overlooked and underplayed' (Parker and Lynn, 2002:9) the role that race and racism play in the formation of laws. Consequently, CRT identified the need for Black and other minority groups to move the debate on race, racism and its impact from 'the realm of the experiential to the realm of the ideological' (Parker and Lynn, 2002:8).

Whilst CRT is distinguishable from much of the traditional civil right scholarship, it is critical and, therefore, radical, which is a commitment it inherited from CLS (Harris, 1997). Scholars such as Alan Freeman and Derrick Bell, who is considered to be CRT's 'intellectual father figure' (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001:12), set the template that guided the development of this movement, which was distressed by the slow, limited and often regressive pace of racial reform in the US (Delgado and Stefancic, 2013; Hughes et al., 2013). For instance, Bell (2016:36) argued that the legal system 'disempowers' Black and other minority groups, whilst some CRT scholars see civil rights legislation as simply a mechanism for mediating the pace of racial progress:

Criticalists question whether civil rights law is designed to benefit folks of color, and even suggest that it is really a homeostatic mechanism that ensures that racial progress occurs at just the right pace: Change that is too rapid would be unsettling to society at large; that which is too slow could prove destabilizing (Delgado and Stefancic, 2000:xvii).

In the introduction, I drew attention to similar mechanisms in the UK (particularly with regard to the way in which race equality policy is often constrained and reversed over time). As a result, racism in the UK is also an 'unstated, homeostatic mechanism for maintaining and replicating social relations' (Delgado, 2001:2295). Delgado (2000:369) described this as the 'zigzag path', with periods of advancement being superseded by retrenchment.

### **CRT insights**

Some CRT scholars (see, for example, Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Bell, 2016) have emphasised the fluidity and complexity of CRT. Crenshaw et al. (1995:xiii), for example, argued that 'Critical Race scholarship differs in object, argument, accent, and emphasis', but that its adherents do share similar concerns and objectives with regard to racism. Several scholars have, therefore, sought to set out the main insights that CRT offers (see, for example, Solórzano, 1997, 1998; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Parker and Lynn

2002). Parker and Lynn (2002:10) stated that CRT has three main goals: (a) to explain that storytelling and narratives act as valid approaches through which scholars can examine race and racism; (b) to contend that 'racial subjugation' must be eliminated (even though the notion of race is in itself a social construct); and (c) to delineate the important relationships between race and other axes of domination (such as social class and disability). It is not my intention to explain each version in detail. I do, however, want to offer a synthesised account that captures the main strands discussed by a number of CRT scholars, but principally that offered by Delgado and Stefancic (2001).

The first insight contends that racism is normal and that people of colour confront it every day (Tate, 1997; Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Gillborn, 2008; Hylton, 2012). For example, 'a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained' (Crenshaw et al, 1995: xiii). This means that racism is 'an ingrained feature of our landscape' (Delgado and Stefancic, 2013:2) that appears orderly and ordinary (Crenshaw et al, 1995; Delgado and Stefancic, 2013). In addition, equal opportunities policies can only address 'extreme and shocking forms of injustice' (ibid), but are inadequately placed to redress the 'business-as-usual' racial discrimination that Black and other ethnic minority people routinely confront (Delgado and Stefancic, 2013:2). This is a view that several CRT scholars have made reference to. Taylor (2016:3), for example, argued that the degree to which racism is 'a normal fact of daily life' means that racial discrimination is so embedded into the structures of society that it is almost unrecognisable. What this means is that racial discrimination, whether it be microaggressions<sup>8</sup>, individual acts of racism or institutional racism, are not isolated instances but, instead, reflect the 'larger, structural, and institutional fact of white hegemony' (Taylor, 1998:123) that exists in society (Taylor, 1998; Solorzano et al., 2000; Delgado and Stefancic, 2012; Rollock, 2012a). Indeed, Taylor (1998:123) contended that the 'normalization of expected, race based practices' in areas such as education makes the

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<sup>8</sup> Microaggressions are the everyday interactions that are exemplified by subtle insults (such as those of a verbal, non-verbal and/or visual nature) that reinforce the misconception that Black and minority ethnic people are racially inferior.

racism that it gives rise to 'look ordinary and natural, to such a degree that oppression no longer seems like oppression to the perpetrators'.

This does not, however, constitute a dismissal or disregard by CRT for racism that arises from, for example, anger and resentment. For instance, Brook (2009:90) argued that, whilst CRT contends that 'racism exists despite the absence of invidious intent', one should not presume that it is dismissive of the 'malicious intent' or considers 'old-fashioned racism' as little more than 'a racial inconvenience in post-civil rights'. Therefore, CRT needs to understand the relationship between social structure and 'professed ideals such as "the rule of law and "equal protection"' and seek to change 'the vexed bond between law and racial power' (Crenshaw et al, 1995: xiii).

This means that significant change is required through the enactment of policies focused on race, as Black and other minority ethnic people are the ones who are 'universally oppressed' (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995:62). However, as CRT also contends, societies informed by liberalism (a concept I explain in more detail later and again in the next chapter) lack the ability to enact such change (Bell, 1980; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2003). Instead, they uphold the 'painstaking slow process' (Ladson-Billings, 2003:9) of securing equal rights for Black and other ethnic minority people (Crenshaw et al, 1995; Delgado, 2000, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2003). Bell (1992:3) offered an even stronger indictment by arguing that the deeply 'embedded personal attitudes and public policy assumptions' that supported slavery have not dissipated, which is emblematic of the reason why advancements in race are 'steadily eroded'.

CRT also contends that, despite the fundamental role race plays in society, discussions concerned with it are 'muted and marginalised' (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). It may be for this reason that Parker (2003:185) argued that the ingrained nature of racism has a historical context to such an extent that it cannot easily be eradicated. He stated that it is 'an endemic part of everyday life, deeply ingrained through historical conscious and ideological choices about race' (ibid). This robust critique of society in the US may explain why Tate

(1997:197) argued that CRT not only emerged as a response to the stalling of progress associated with civil rights, but the 'retrenching of civil rights gains'.

It is important to point out that whilst CRT puts race at the centre of its analysis, some scholars have argued for a re-examination of the concept as it is not a fixed term. Parker and Lynn (2002:11), for example, argued that race has 'fluid, decentered social meanings that are continually shaped by political pressures'. In addition, Donner (2005:52) stated that race is 'more than categorical differences in phenotype, motivation, attitude or socioeconomic status'. It is for this reason he contended that CRT considers race a social construct situated in the 'lived experiences of a group of people with a common history and ancestry' (ibid).

This insight is not just pertinent to the US, but also to the UK and the study of race and education in this thesis. I want to offer four examples in order to illustrate this point. First, it is clear that similar forms of racism exist and are endemic in the UK. This is exemplified by the arguments and data I set out in the introduction in relation to the distribution of power and resources and the inequity in the access to, and treatment by, public and private services (including education) along the lines of race. Second, the UK equally suffers from slow, limited and regressive policy enactment in relation to race. This is also evident from the arguments I set out in the introduction and forms one of the principal areas for investigation in this thesis. Third, the inadequate progress towards race equality has done little to prevent the emergency of a 'post-racial fallacy' (Gillborn et al., 2016:4) in the UK. For example, despite race being the critical factor in the areas that I referred to in the introduction, one may contend that race and racism are seldom mentioned as problems in the UK unless they concern issues of diversity (Gilroy, 1990; Gillborn, 2016, 2016a). What is more, as I will illustrate at several points in this thesis (particularly in chapter 6 in relation to how data has been used to explain away the underachievement of Black children), race and racism are often 'relegated to the sidelines' or considered to be 'complexifying element[s] in a situation that is really about class, or really about gender' (Gillborn, 2006:320). Fourth, there is evidence of historical misconceptions of race being made in the UK. For example, in the English education system, at the core of institutional racism are historical misconceptions that are held by many teachers and have also been inculcated in Black children, such as the

view that to be a young Black man equates to being an inferior learner<sup>9</sup>, oppositional to the culture and values of schooling and education more broadly and even a physical threat to teachers (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986; Gillborn, 1990; Strand, 2011; Kulz, 2014). These notions are not new, but they are a manifestation of the views held during slavery when Black people were also considered to be inferior (some even worthless because they held no economic value) (Fryer, 1984; Delgado, 2001; Olusoga, 2016).

The second insight, which is often mediated through the process of storytelling, is that CRT challenges racial oppression, which gives rise to the status quo, and confronts the 'myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms' (Delgado and Stefancic, 2000:xvii) that maintain the subordination of Black people in society:

Starting from the premise that a culture constructs its own social reality in ways that promote its own self-interest, these scholars set out to construct a different reality. Our social world, with its rules, practices, and assignments of prestige and power, is not fixed; rather, we construct it with words, stories, and silence. But we need not acquiesce in arrangements that are unfair and one-sided. By writing and speaking against them, we may hope to contribute to a better, fairer world (ibid).

This is relevant because, in the context of the changes in Black children's attainment, I too question the notion that there has been tangible progress in the state of race equality in education and society more broadly.

The third insight is concerned with 'interest convergence' (Bell, 1980:94) or 'material determinism' (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001:7). It is the view that 'civil rights gains for communities of color coincide with the dictates of white self-interest' as opposed to 'altruism'. What this means is that racism advances the interests of White people, so large

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<sup>9</sup> Several scholars, including a number from CRT, have deconstructed such pseudo-scientific arguments that are associated with the misconception that Black children are inferior learners (see, for example, Delgado 1998; Gillborn and Youdell, 2000; Graves, 2004; Leonardo, 2005; Gillborn, 2016, 2008; Bell, 2016).

parts of society have little incentive to confront and eradicate it unless it addresses their self-interest (Bell, 1980; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). Therefore, in all other circumstances calls to dismantle racial inequality go unheard. CRT scholars argue that colour-blindness<sup>10</sup>, which refers to the ‘seemingly neutral and objective method of decisionmaking that avoids any consideration of race’ (Gotanda, 2000:35), has been adopted by liberal societies as a means of justify this inaction. Yet, as CRT contents, colour-blindness (a) disregards the fact that ‘inequity, inopportunity, and oppression are historical artefacts that will not easily be remedied by ignoring race in the contemporary society’ (DeCuir and Dixon, 2004:29) and (b) fails to eliminate the potential for racism to persist (Gotanda, 2000; DeCuir and Dixon, 2004).

The fourth insight is what some CRT scholars describe as the ‘social construction thesis’ (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001:7) which, as I briefly referred to at the beginning of this chapter, states that race and racism are products of social thought and relations rather than any objective, inherent or fixed biological or genetic reality. This strand of work is of importance given that, for example, research in education has a history of using biological perspectives in order to explain away educational problems (Parker and Lynn, 2002; Donner, 2005; Gillborn, 2008). I do not address this insight in this thesis, but I start from the premise that differences in attainment cannot be explained by genetic/biological explanations which propose that some races are superior or inferior to others.

### **CRT and education**

The focus afforded to education by CRT scholars is not incidental, as one of the seminal moments that gave rise to this movement was concerned with the lack of race and gender diversity in higher education (see, for example, Crenshaw, 1995 and Taylor, 2016). What is more, some CRT scholars contend that equality can only truly be secured if inequality can be eradicated from education. Yet, CRT has a relatively short history in this field, as it only gained prominence in this area in the mid-1990s (Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Gillborn,

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<sup>10</sup> I address the notion of colour-blindness in more detail later in this chapter.



2008; Taylor, 2016). It emerged due to the same frustrations that brought about its application in the wider movement:

Educators of color of my generation, like our legal counterparts, were eager for a form of scholarly dialogue, research methodology, and pedagogical framework in which to challenge the stalled Civil Rights Movement and the myth that we were going to soon be living in a colorblind society (...). But events in the 1980s, including the abandonment of affirmative action, the re-segregation of most schools, and the growing racial achievement gap, left many of us disaffected (Taylor, 2016:7).

CRT also developed at a time in which race in education was, according to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995:50), 'under-theorized', in so far as that there was an 'intellectual salience' that had not been 'systematically employed in the analysis of educational inequality' (ibid). For example, prominent CRT scholars such as Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) recognised that gender based explanations were insufficiently placed to explain differences in the experiences and performance of minority groups. It is, therefore, fitting that CRT is now being used in America, here in the UK and across the globe. Indeed, its growth in education has been 'exponential' (Taylor, 2016:7), as it has rapidly established itself as 'one of the most important strands in contemporary educational theory' (Gillborn and Ladson-Billings, 2009:38). This is due to its focus on, for example, the relationship between social theory and social activism as a means to 'define, expose, and address educational problems' (Parker and Lynn, 2002:7). Indeed, it offers a 'theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses' (Yosso, 2005:74):

CRT in education refutes dominant ideology and White privilege while validating and centering the experiences of People of Color. CRT utilizes transdisciplinary approaches to link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community (ibid).

As a result, CRT has ensured that discussions centred on multicultural education (whether theory or practice) must consider race and racism if they are not to be seen as a 'vacuous, empty exercise that keeps in place the current sociopolitical configurations' (Ladson-Billings, 1996:254).

### **Policy analysis**

CRT is relevant to the study of, amongst other areas, curriculum, assessment, funding and desegregation (Ladson-Billings, 1998). A key strand of CRT analysis concerns the way in which education systems have poorly served Black children (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). For example, CRT seeks to expose the failings of the deficit model, which is an approach that has been taken to the education of Black children in England (Gillborn, 2008). This model contends that underachievement is the result of the child's deficiencies as opposed to those of the education system (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000; Sewell, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Rollock, 2007; Gillborn, 2010; Rollock et al., 2015). For example, CRT draws attention to the failure of schools' pedagogical approaches, which has led to the assumption that what is required for Black children is remediation (Ladson-Billings, 1998). In addition, the deficit model of thinking is exemplified by the way in which race in schools is often coded as 'cultural difference' (Yosso, 2005:75) as opposed to a mechanism for subordinating Black children (ibid). The work of Derrick Bell is of particular importance to the CRT movement, but also this thesis, as it focuses on education policy and the way in which it has subordinated Black children (Tate, 1997). The work of Gillborn (2008, 2010, 2016), who is arguably the most prominent CRT scholar who carries out research on race and education in Britain, is also crucial.

### **The colour-blind approach**

CRT is also concerned with exposing and challenging the 'ascendance of a colorblind ideology' (Mutua, 2006:393), as it seeks to ignore the 'structural, persistent and current manifestations of racism' (ibid). What I mean by this is that liberalism contends that racism is out-dated and has been successfully replaced by colour-blindness, which is a neutral,

objective and meritocratic approach that avoids any consideration of race (Gotanda, 2000; DeLorme and Singer, 2010). Colour-blindness is in effect the 'nonrecognition of race' (Gotanda, 2000:35) in all forms of decision making. Several perspectives ranging from racism is not a problem, to colour-blind policies will address what issues remain, stems from this stance (Delgado and Stefancic, 2013; Gillborn, 2016, 2016a). Indeed, in its advancement of racial equality, liberalism and the civil rights discourse in particular consider the colour-blind approach to be morally and politically superior to race consciousness, as it involves what Gotanda (2000:35) described as 'noticing but not considering' race as a critical factor in, for example, policy enactment (Tate, 1997; Gotanda, 2000).

However, CRT contends that colour-blindness is not a benign attempt to ensure race is not used as a discriminatory factor, but 'an obstinate refusal to consider ethnic diversity, (Gillborn, 2003:18, 2008:715) despite the mounting evidence that Black and other ethnic minorities are not sharing equally in the economic, political and social life of society (ibid). For instance, colour-blindness ensures historical facts that have assisted in explaining the subordination of Black people are disregarded in place of neoliberal analysis and solutions (Apple, 2000; Clarke, 2012; Annamma et al., 2017). What is more, whilst liberalism contends that the goal of colour-blind ideology is 'ostensively to promote equality as symmetry among the races', it is arguably the case that it in fact 'cements the privileges of whiteness' (Mutua, 2006:394). This means that the failure to recognise race as a factor in society is tantamount to 'ignor[ing] what has already been noticed' (Gotanda, 2000:36). For instance, colour-blind policies reflect and give rise to unwitting racism through the enactment of policies based on universally applied criterion that unintentionally and/or disproportionately affect particular racial groups (Mason, 1982; Macpherson, 1999). In education, for example, the colour-blind approach may seem laudable, but if the same ethnic groups underachieve each year then one should question whether the non-recognition of race, or the de-prioritisation of racial discrimination as a problem, is the cause. What is more, if this problem is actively ignored or discounted, institutional racism may be in operation. Warren (2005: 244), for example, wrote the following:

[T]he 'normal' processes of selection, pedagogy, curriculum and assessment - the circuits of power in schooling are self-consciously colour-blind, driven by a meritocratic principle. Yet, these apparently normal practices consistently produce racist effects.

Therefore, if in such circumstances institutional racism may be in operation, colour-blindness has arguably failed and the widely held view that liberal democracies are meritocratic must be questioned, too. Indeed, CRT rejects the notion that societies that reproduce racial bias are meritocratic; contend that meritocracy and colour-blindness act as 'code words' (Donner, 2005:58) for laws and policies that serve the social, political and economic interests of White people (ibid); and argue that concepts such as meritocracy and colour-blindness represent what Parker and Lynn (2002:9) described as 'precursors' for 'hegemonic control' by White people (Parker and Lynn, 2002; Donner, 2005).

### **Intersectionality**

CRT is also concerned with 'intersectionality' (Crenshaw, 1989:141; 1991:124), which involves the examination of race, sex, class, sexuality and disability and how they 'interact in a system of oppression' (Delgado and Stefancic, 2000: 249). As with other aspects of CRT, the origin of intersectionality can be traced back to Marxism, where scholars such as Luis Althusser sought to understand the role of culture in education (Apple, 2015). Therefore, whilst CRT began as a critique of the slow pace of change following the enactment of civil rights legislation in the US and focuses on the subordination of Black people by their White counterparts, it has also developed a focus on the complexities of racism and its intersections with other forms of discrimination (Yosso, 2005).

Intersectionality can, for example, enable CRT to go beyond the 'reductive and essentializing perspectives (i.e. it is all class, or all gender, or all race)' (Apple, 2017:408). What is more, it 'works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of opposing or eliminating others (sic) forms of subordination' (Singer, 2005:369). In education, for instance, the progression of CRT is in part reliant on 'the efforts made by researchers and scholars to

explore the possible connections between race, gender and class to schools' (Parker and Lynn, 2016:150). For example, an analysis undertaken by the Office of the Children's Commissioner (2012) found that, in 2009-10, Black African Caribbean boys with special needs and eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) (an indicator of economic disadvantage that I discuss in more detail in chapter 5) were 168 times more likely to be permanently excluded from a state-funded schools than a White, middle class girl without special needs. Intersectionality is ideally placed to understand why this might be the case.

Therefore, intersectionality is considered a 'concomitant' of CRT (West, 1995:xi) and has gained prominence in education (see, for example, Gillborn, 2010; Rollock et. al, 2015; Parker and Lynn, 2016), but also elsewhere (see, for example, Cadwell, 2000). In chapter 5, I focus on the intersection between race and social class in order to illustrate how economically disadvantaged children have been exploited to further the interests of the White middle class.

## **Whiteness**

I want to draw attention to two further concepts used by CRT. The first is what CRT scholars refer to as 'whiteness' (Harris, 1993:1709; Leonardo, 2004:137). It is a 'racial discourse' (Leonardo, 2007:119), status and world view that is used to allocate benefits and 'racialized privilege' (Harris, 1993:1714) to White people. Leonardo (2007:110), for example, wrote the following:

As a collection of everyday strategies, whiteness is characterized by the unwillingness to name the contours of racism, the avoidance of identifying with a racial experience or group, the minimization of racist legacy, and other similar evasions.

Whiteness also 'dictates both the macro-structural and institutional arrangements of society and the micro-level of individual thinking and speech' (Leonardo and Manning, 2017). As a result, whilst it can go unnoticed (indeed, as Gillborn (2005) argued, those involved seldom

realise that it exists), it is a 'treasured property', which means that being White is an asset which those considered a member of this group have sought to protect and others try to attain fraudulently if required (Harris, 1993:1714). For example, Harris (1993:173) argued that whiteness brought favourable assumptions about those who hold such a status:

Whites have come to expect and rely on these benefits, and over time these expectations have been affirmed, legalised, and protected by law.

There appears to be an interesting link between whiteness and interest convergence that can be located in the origins of CRT. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001:17), interest convergence derived from the realist tradition in the CRT movement. In contrast to idealists, who considered racism to be a process of thought, such as 'thinking, mental construction, attitudes, and discourse' (ibid), realists believe that racism goes beyond this: it is concerned with the allocation of privilege and status, for example. This allocation of priority status may explain why the interests of White people are prioritised. What I mean by this is that Whiteness is 'the optimal status criterion or standard' (Singer, 2005:369) and, therefore, is treated as such, in areas such as the enactment of policy. Consequently, the expectation that the interests of White people will be prioritised is embedded into every aspect of society. Grillo and Wildman (1991:650) put forward the following argument:

Because whiteness is the norm, it is easy to forget that it is not the only perspective. Thus, members of dominant groups assume that their perceptions are the pertinent ones, that their problems are the ones that need to be addressed, and that in discourse they should be the speaker rather than the listener.

### **White supremacy**

The second concept that I want to draw attention to is white supremacy, which describes the kind of racial discrimination that CRT scholars seek to expose (hook, 1989, 1999; Harris, 1993; Ansley, 1997; Leonardo, 2004; Gillborn, 2006). In this context, white supremacy is not concerned with the fascist notions of the concept (Ansley, 1997; Gillborn, 2006). In CRT

activism and scholarship, white supremacy denotes 'the operation of forces that saturate the everyday, mundane actions and policies that shape the world in the interests of white people' (Gillborn, 2006:320). Indeed, Ansley (1997:592) wrote the following:

I do not mean to allude only to the self-conscious racism of white supremacist hate groups. I refer instead to 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.

This means that a white supremacist society can be characterised as one in which the collective power of White people is asserted over their Black counterparts (hooks, 1999) and the 'interests and perceptions of white subjects are continually placed centre stage and assumed as 'normal'' (Gillborn, 2006:318). This means white supremacy goes 'unremarked in the political mainstream' (Gillborn, 2005a:485). In education, white supremacy is evident in, for example, the way in which assessment mechanisms have been used to produce racial inequality (Gillborn, 2006). I do not, however, want to dwell on this concept here as I intend to use the traditional conceptualisation of institutional racism (which I will set out later in this chapter) in order to describe this kind of societal, racially informed oppression.

### **Putting race at the centre**

In sum, CRT offers several useful insights that will enhance this investigation. First, it puts race at the centre of its examination of society and the way in which it operates to disadvantage Black people and explores 'beneath the surface, to expose the deeper currents of race inequity' (Gillborn, 2016:366). This is important as I seek to establish why, during the period this thesis is concerned with, the attainment of Black children improved, but also endeavour to understand whether the education policy of that time disadvantaged this very group of children. Second, CRT offers an explanation for the slow pace of change (and in some cases retrenchment) in race equality policy. This is an issue I seek to explore;

particularly with regard to what appears to be the inaction of successive governments in relation to race and educational attainment. Indeed, I share the argument made by CRT scholars that incremental progress cannot address racial inequality and racism. Third, CRT rejects the liberal view that racism is aberrant and that, therefore, a colour-blind approach will suffice to address racism. This will assist in my analysis and explanation of policy enactment during this time.

### **Critiquing CRT**

Gillborn and Ladson-Billings (2009) recognised that, as with any new perspective, CRT has been subject to a range of responses, or what Delgado and Stefancic (2001:87) characterised as ‘stubborn resistance’. Therefore, in this section I want to set out several of the most salient criticisms.

The first is concerned with the relationship CRT has with Marxism. Cole (2009:25) argued that although CRT draws some of its ideas from Marxism, it fails to fully embrace the relationship between racism and capitalism. This argument should, however, be rejected as CRT does not seek to mask social class exploitation. It does, however, ‘peer into the lives and consciousness of the white imaginary in attempts to produce a more complete portrait of global racism and ways to combat it’ (Leonardo, 2002:45). Indeed, concepts such as white privilege (McIntosh, 1988:1), which refers to the unearned and, indeed, unrecognised status and privileges afforded to those who are associated with the socially constructed notion of White, are used to understand and articulate this form of global racism (McIntosh, 1988; Leonardo, 2002). In addition, whilst CRT is principally concerned with race, it also ‘centers race at the intersection of other social identities’ (Agosto et al., 2015:787). Indeed, as I explained earlier, intersectionality continues to grow as a body of scholarly work within CRT (including with regard to the importance of social class). This demonstrates that CRT scholars have been proactive in their considerations of social class. For example, it was the CRT scholar Lawson-Billings (2013:39), when setting out the foundations of CRT, who stated the following:



Because our society is organized along binaries, intersectionality is a difficult concept to research. We see things as black or white, east or west, rich or poor, right or left. When we move into the complexities of real life we recognize that we each represent multiple identities—race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, religion, and many more.

Cole (2009) also argued that Marxists reject the argument made by CRT that racism is central to the way in which society operates. It is arguably the case that this is indeed a matter of significant difference as CRT considers racism to be a mainstream issue and views race and racism 'not as fringe questions but as a volatile presence at the very centre of British politics' (Gilroy, 1990:73). Indeed, Apple (2006:686) warned that scholars 'risk practicing a form of whiteness' if they contend that all important issues, such as racism, can be comprehensively understood by 'merging race (...) into a relatively economic understanding of Marx'.

Several scholars have criticised CRT for failing to (a) offer solutions to the problems it seeks to expose (Cole, 2009) and (b) influence public policy (Subotnik, 1998). For example, Cole (2009:148) argued that, as opposed to theories such as Marxism, CRT appears to be 'lacking in direction for moving humankind forward progressively' and, therefore, is susceptible to some of the criticisms made of other perspectives (such as postmodernism, for example):

[W]hile making calls for liberation and the end of oppression, [CRT] in fact offers no concrete solutions for this (ibid).

This criticism appears misplaced, given that CRT has clearly stated that dismantling racism and white supremacy is central to ending the status quo in relation to racial inequality.

Whilst Cole (2009:133) has been critical of CRT he has, however, highlighted some important areas with which he agrees with it, such as its call to challenge the 'dominant ideology' of colour-blindness, meritocracy and objectivity; its stance on social justice and intersectionality and the desire to eliminate poverty; and its position on the unequal distribution of opportunity in education systems.

Maisuria (2012:81) argued that CRT has failed to adequately define what it means by race, even though it is central to its analysis of society and the way in which it operates:

The inconsistent use of quotation marks [when referencing race] raises questions about how CRT conceptualises 'race' and is significant for theorisation. The options for CRT scholars are: 1) 'race' is not a social construction or 2) 'race' is a social construction. If the former conceptualisation is to be used by CRT scholars, then is the biological conceptualisation of 'race' being deployed and is 'race' therefore being reified? Without denoting its problematic nature by using quotation marks 'race' becomes an a priori scientific truth, which is widely discredited, associated with far-right movements, and as of having no history.

This is a debate I addressed earlier, so I will not return to it in any substantial way here. However, it is important to emphasise that CRT does indeed confront the conceptualisation of race that Maisuria (2012) referred to.

CRT has also been criticised for an over-focus on the Black/White binary (Trevino et al., 2008). In addition, Maisuria (2012) suggested that CRT presents all White people as oppressors and all Black people as the oppressed and, therefore, fails to recognise the White people who are oppressed. He stated the following:

My point is not that only one group should be victimised; rather, the call is to recognise that victims (and oppressors) are not a homogenous group along colour lines. Establishing a colour-bar practice for Black people is exclusionary, separatist and divisive, which would create resentment and localised apartheid (Maisuria, 2012:88).

Gillborn (2010a:4) is right to reject this criticism on the basis that CRT does not see all White people as a homogenised racist and uniformly privileged group. Indeed, he argued that White people do not all 'draw similar benefits – but they do all benefit to some degree, whether they like it or not'. In chapter 5, for example, I will draw on CRT in order to

understand why the position of White children who are economically disadvantaged differs from those of their White middle class counterparts but, as Gillborn (2010a) argued, they still benefit from being White.

The most pronounced criticism made by Trevino et al. (2008:9) was that (a) CRT does not offer 'a unified theory but a loose hodgepodge of analytic tools' and (b) it lacks the 'intellectual architecture (...) that is representative, and in fact required, of most social theory'. However, whilst CRT is an iterative project of scholarship that has a degree of fluidity, as I have set out above, it does, for example, have an overarching structure (including principal ideas, insights and tools). Therefore, this argument should be rejected. One would not, for example, argue that Marxism is not a theory because its scholars have some divergent views.

Rosen (2000:584) has offered an emotive critique of CRT. He contended that, through storytelling, CRT embraces, and indeed propagates, conspiracy theories that are 'widely accepted in the black community', challenges the rule of law and champions criminality and empowers those who, he claims, have called for a race war. Similarly, CRT has been criticised for being dangerous (Tate, 2005). Peterson (2003:2), for example, wrote the following:

Black educators have (...) devised what they call critical race theory, which claims that there's no such thing as objective reality - that "rationality" is simply a tool of white males and is designed to oppress minorities. Black preachers who have been seduced by these deadly attitudes and political philosophies are perpetuating a cycle of hatred and violence within the black community.

These arguments are, of course, inconsistent with the way in which CRT scholars have sought to set out the principle arguments put forward by this perspective (as I have also attempted to do above). What is more, given that CRT is grounded in legal scholarship, this critique is at best inaccurate. One should also be dismissive of such criticisms as CRT is in

fact concerned with equality, as opposed to superiority, and seeks to end actions such as racially motivated discrimination (including violence) instead of perpetuating it.

A further criticism of CRT is that it can be seen as too 'nihilistic' (Taylor, 2016:9) and fatalistic. For example, Subotnik (1998:751) argued that CRT 'take[s] pleasure in - and profit from - spreading gloom'; Rosen (2000:584) contended that CRT's 'prevailing mood is fatalism'; and Freeman (2000:576) was critical of Bell's work for being pessimistic about the chances of real racial progress:

For some, Bell's emphasis will be regarded as merely cynical; others will find it realistic. At this point, my first serious issue reappears. What is one supposed to do in teaching this course? The simplest, but perhaps too facile, answer is: Tell the truth. Yet if the truth seems so hopeless and dismal, and the generation of more legal argument so pointless, then one is dealing with something other than the usual law school enterprise of helping students to fashion a measure of craft, skill, and insight to deal with the needs and hopes of social life.

However, Taylor (2016:9) rightly asserted that these are inappropriate criticisms given that, paradoxically, it is this that makes CRT inspiring. He contended that '[f]or those engaged in the effort to overcome injustice, this sense of futility may be a source of affirmation' (ibid).

Litowitz (1997:519) offered an interesting criticism by likening CRT to narcissism:

Freud's terminology [of narcissism] seems to fit much of the work done in CRT (...). Much CRT scholarship seems to be infused with the mistaken notion that blacks have a unique ability to write about how the law affects blacks, that only Hispanics can really see how the law affects Hispanics, that white judges can't act as good judges in cases involving these "out-groups". (...) Part of the problem here is that CRT seems to fall victim to balkanization, a splintering effect which each racial, ethnic, or gender category becomes a unitary focus, to the neglect of the fragile overlapping consensus which binds us.

Several scholars have made similar points. For example, Subotnik (1998) argued that CRT excludes White academics from the debate on race, whilst Maisuria (2012:89) argued that White people are precluded from challenging CRT without being accused of 'using the privilege of whiteness to reject threats to that very privilege' and sustaining white supremacy. In addition, Cole and Maisuria (2007:95) argued that the use of white supremacy by David Gillborn is 'misleading and incomplete' as it 'homogenises all white people together in positions of class power and privilege'. Indeed, Cole (2009:113) argued that the effects of social class exploitation and oppression are masked by what he described as 'blanket assertions of White Supremacy and White Privilege' (ibid).

I do not share these criticisms for several reasons. First, as I have already argued, some of the most significant contributions to CRT in the UK have derived from the scholarly work of Gillborn (2008, 2010, 2016), which is important to emphasise because, as he argued, '[i]t is possible for white people to take a real and active role in deconstructing whiteness but such 'race traitors' are relatively uncommon'(Gillborn, 2005:488). Second, whilst the lived experiences of Black people are important to the study of race (Delgado and Stefancic, 2000, 2001; Gillborn, 2008), these accounts do not necessarily have to derive from the scholars who write from this perspective. Third, as I referred to above, the growing work of intersectionality makes any notion of CRT being susceptible to balkanisation defunct.

### **Interest convergence**

Having reviewed the scholarly work in relation to CRT, I now want to turn to the conceptual tool of 'interest convergence' (Bell, 1980:523), which is a central tenet of CRT and is a theory that informs this thesis. Donner (2005:58) described it as 'an analytical construct' that accounts for the factors that motivate the enactment of policies that aim to eradicate racial discrimination or seeks to address racial injustice. Gillborn (2014:29) argued that the interest convergence principle 'points to the politics involved in social change and - more importantly - the uncertain nature of even the most impressive-looking victories'. This is an argument that I began to set out in the introduction.

Edward Taylor (2016) credited Marxism with developing the theory of interest convergence (although it uses different vernacular). He contended that the central argument that informs interest convergence is synonymous with the Marxist view that the bourgeoisie will endure the advancement of the proletariat only if it is to the benefit of the dominant class (ibid). It was Bell (1980:523), however, who popularised interest convergence as it is understood within CRT. He asserted that measures that allow for racial progress may be 'outward manifestations of unspoken and perhaps subconscious judicial conclusions' that such advancements would 'secure, advance, or at least not harm' the interests of those people who in Britain we would consider to be the Whites middle class (ibid). What this means is that (a) moves towards equality will only receive judicial sanction if that action does not threaten the 'superior social status of middle and upper class whites' and (b) 'the interests of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites' (Bell, 1985: 523). Therefore, one may also conclude that, as Leigh (2003: 277) argued, in circumstances in which the interests of Black people are in opposition to 'those of the dominant White power structure', progress is stalled.

### **Self-interest**

The notion of self-interest is important to understanding the interest convergence principle. It refers to 'the selfishness behind many policies that may advance greater racial equity' (Castagno and Lee, 2007:10). For example, claims of neutrality, objectivity, colour-blindness and meritocracy masks the self-interest of the powerful in society (Tate, 1997; Chapman et al., 2013). This point is worth explaining in more detail, as interest convergence is central to this thesis. CRT, and the interest convergence principle in particular, is concerned with explaining (a) why, under normal circumstances, large parts of society lack the motivation to confront and eradicate racism; (b) what gives rise to instances in which the interests of the dominant group align with those that are subordinated; and, subsequently, (c) why those opposed to racial equality policies suddenly concede ground to subordinated groups and, superficially, appear committed to racial equality (Bell, 1980; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Leigh, 2003). Consequently, the interest convergence principle is an explanatory tool for

understanding why racism advances the self-interests of White people. In sum, the interest convergence principle explains that the majority only tolerate advances in racial equality when the measures are in their self-interest (Bell, 1980; Castagno and Lee, 2007). In chapters 5, 6 and 7 I apply this conceptual tool to the data in this thesis.

Brown (1994:337) argued that self-interest on the grounds of race has a greater impact on social policy (such as education) than other areas and 'almost nothing involving education is exempt from political motives'. This appears to be the case here. For example, as I set out earlier, Bell (1980) contended that desegregation in schooling following the Brown versus Board of Education case was motivated by institutional self-interest. Mary Dudziak (2000:106) argued that, following World War II, there was increased attention paid to racial discrimination in the United States, as newspapers throughout the world carried stories about the racial discrimination experienced by Black Americans and other Black and minority ethnic people who visited foreign dignitaries. This was not only counter to the efforts of the US to 'reshape the post-war world in its own image' (ibid), the continuation of racial segregation was also embarrassing:

The focus of American foreign policy at this point was to promote democracy and to "contain communism". However, the international focus on U.S. racial problems meant that the image of American democracy was tarnished. The apparent contradictions between American political ideology and practice led to particular foreign policy difficulties with countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. U.S. government officials realized that their ability to sell democracy to the Third World was seriously hampered by continuing racial injustice at home. Accordingly, efforts to promote civil rights within the United States were consistent with, and important to, the more central U.S. mission of fighting world communism (Dudziak, 2000: 106).

Another important aspect of the interest convergence principle is the unearned status of White people. According to Bell (1980:522), White people may support social justice and equity-oriented policies yet still believe that injustice can be 'remedied effectively without altering the status of whites'. As a result, the loss and gain principle is important, as there

must be negotiations and then sacrifices made in order for the interests of both the dominant and subordinated groups to align (Bell, 1980; Leigh, 2003; Donnor, 2016). The work of Milner (2008:334) is helpful here, who wrote the following:

Self and systemic interests and the loss–gain binary are intensified by a permeating pace imperative, which means that convergence and change are often at the moderately slow pace of those in power.

Jackson (2011:440) identified four types of interest gained, or in fact reinforced, by White people through the interest convergence principle. Material interest, which refers to gains incurred through the ‘maintenance of the superior socioeconomic status of whites’; emotional interest, which refers to the well-being that White people can feel as a result of being White; psychological interest, which refers to the positive and negative thoughts White people have in response to race; and moral interest, which refers to ‘the moral and ethical bankruptcy of humanity’ (Jackson, 2011:441) that White people often experience as a result of acting out of ‘false charity’ (ibid) rather than acknowledging the legacy of racism enacted by White people and working in solidarity with others to eradicate it. She arrives at the following conclusion:

With nuanced understandings of how the ‘interest’ in ‘interest convergence’ is not monolithic, but varied and complex, we can fully grasp how racism undermines the psychological and moral interests of whites in ways that are far more disadvantageous than their material and emotional interest gains ever will be (Jackson, 2011:454).

From a CRT perspective, therefore, the problem for White people in this loss-gain binary is that providing more equitable policies may result in losses that are of great importance to them (Milner, 2008). This may mean, for example, conceding some of the power, privilege or social status they and their future generations can expect to enjoy. These losses are to White people extremely costly and distressing given that ‘their property of Whiteness may depreciate’ (Milner, 2008:334) and, moreover, they must accept that Black and other ethnic



minorities may gain (ibid). To them, this is a highly anxious scenario that is framed as 'I lose-you win' (Milner, 2008:335), which can cause discontentment and prevent the convergence of interests (ibid). Milner (2008) offered the misconceptions held by some White people with regard to Affirmative Action as an example. A White student, for instance, may believe that, as a result of Affirmative Action, his or her Black counterpart misappropriated a place at an elite institution that was rightfully earned by that White student. It is for reasons such as this that self-interest continues to favour the dominant group. What I mean by this is that, as Castagno and Lee (2007:5) argued, if racial equality is only ever motivated by self-interest the status quo will remain (i.e. the dominant group will be privileged). What is more, as the interest convergence principle contends, in circumstances where the interests of White people and those of Black people converge, 'the ensuing false generosity given on the part of Whites is often disproportionate to the gains received by the Black community' (DeLorme and Singer, 2010:368). Moreover, Castagno and Lee (2007:5) argued that institutional self-interest leads to a de-prioritisation of race:

The concern is rooted in the institution's self-interest of being a "better and more competitive" institution rather than in a social justice rationale. This is, of course, explainable in that the institution most likely views issues of diversity and multiculturalism from its own perspective (as we all do), but it is crucial to point out that this is a perspective of power and, particularly, of whiteness.

### **The false promise of interest convergence**

Critical Race Theorists contend that laws enacted as a result of interest convergence fail to realise genuine equality for two reasons: (1) organisations consistently fail to enact policies that give rise to genuine equality and (2) policy enactment that derives from interest convergence safeguard white privilege and construct promises that the state will restore the 'racial equilibrium' once the interests that led to the reform are no longer compelling (Tillery, 2009:647). For example, interest convergence has played an important role in drawing attention to, and gaining an understanding of, the history of affirmative action in America (Adams, 2003; Gillborn, 2008; Driver, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Taylor, 2016). For

instance, Adams (2003) argued that the Supreme Court issued *Grutter v. Bollinger*, which upheld the University of Michigan Law School's affirmative action programme against constitutional challenge, because *Grutter* suggested that integration is imperative if the United States sought to be competitive in the twenty-first century. Integration, therefore, was considered to enhance the lives of Americans more generally, as opposed to minority groups in particular (ibid). Bell (1980) offered the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, which I explain below, as an example of interest convergence, but he also set out an earlier example (i.e. the Emancipation Proclamation) as a 'nineteenth century equivalent' (Bell, 2004a:1057):

President Lincoln's priority was saving the Union, not freeing the slaves. He signed the Emancipation Proclamation when he recognized that it would improve the Union's chances in the Civil War by disrupting the Confederate workforce and discouraging European nations, particularly England and France, from siding with the Confederacy. After Lincoln turned the Civil War into a war to free the slaves, as well as to save the Union, European abolitionists made certain that their governments did not enter the war on the side of the Confederacy. The Emancipation Proclamation also opened the way for the Union to enlist thousands of former slaves who made the difference in many battles, although with very heavy casualties (ibid).

Jackson (2011:438) offers a contemporary example of interest convergence. She argued that the election of President Barack Obama in the US is in the psychological interest of White people as it 'pacifies the racial guilt felt by many whites and contributes to the illusion of a 'color-blind' society'. She pointed out, however, that a more detailed examination of this case reveals that, whilst the election of Obama represents progress towards racial equality, his rise to office worked to the benefit of White people:

I contend that while the guilt many whites feel as a result of their participation in an endemic system of racial domination is placated by the Obama win, the cognitive dissonance that whites continue to experience has hardly subsided (...) [I]n the absence of a serious upturning of the social realities that create such racial inequity, whites continue to benefit materially as they always have, and emotionally by

experiencing a new 'reality' that aligns quite perfectly with color-blind, meritocratic, 'pull yourself up by the bootstrap' ideologies. Whites enjoy the same superior quality of life they enjoyed prior to Obama's presidency while believing that all is well because we now have a black president (for which many whites have voted) (ibid).

CRT scholars such as Ladson-Billings (2013) have also drawn attention to other examples of interest convergence, but what is interesting about the case presented by Jackson (2011) is she appeared to question the long-term benefits for White people in such circumstances (i.e. she questions whether racism, over the longer term, truly benefits White people as they perceive it to). Indeed, she went on to argue that racial progress 'panders to particular white interests while at the same time undercutting others in a somewhat contradictory fashion' (Jackson, 2011:440):

[R]acism undermines the psychological and moral interests of whites in ways that are far more disadvantageous than their material and emotional interest gains ever will be (Jackson, 2011:454).

This is an issue that I will return to in chapter 5 as I set out the data in relation to the focus and investment afforded to London and how it may have assisted in raising the attainment of some Black children.

In sum, the literature suggests that interest convergence offers a critical tool for understanding how developments in public policy merely give the appearance of enhancing moves towards racial equality when in fact the intention is to advance the interests of others (Bell, 1980; Delgado and Stefancic, 2000, 2001; Gillborn, 2008). However, an important qualification is required: the interest-convergence principle does not envisage a 'rational and balanced negotiation between minoritized groups and white power holders' (Gillborn, 2014:29).

## **Interest convergence and education**

As the interest convergence principle 'serve[s] as a tool to elucidate and help make sense of the salience of race and racism' (Milner, 2008: 332), it has been advanced by scholars across the movement as a central proposition of CRT (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Delgado and Stefancic, 2000, 2001; Gillborn, 2008). Significantly, it was first given prominence in the field of education. Bell (1980) offered the landmark ruling of the US Supreme Court of *Brown v. Board of Education*, in which the Court ordered racial desegregation of schooling in the south of the US, in order to explain interest convergence. The judgment was described by Christopher Vasilopoulos (1994:291) as holding 'revolutionary status', whilst Donelan et al. (1994:376) argued that it was an action of 'moral suasion':

In *Brown*, the Supreme Court unanimously recognized that de jure segregation of school children by race, even if the facilities and other tangibles were equal, deprives them of equal educational opportunity.

However, many scholars have sought to demonstrate the various ways in which this judgement has failed to realise the racial equality it was intended to (Bell, 1980; Brown, 1994; Donelan et al., 1994). Bell (1980) contended that the ruling was little to do with equality and offered three alternative explanations. First, it was taken to bolster America's reputation abroad (it viewed racial inequality as being contradictory to its propaganda campaign aimed at defeating Communism). As Dudziak (2000:115) argued, America could not save the Third World for democracy if democracy meant white supremacy. Second, the ruling was given to reassure Black people that the equality and freedoms they fought for abroad in World War II would be secured at home (a demoralised section of the army being counterproductive). Third, it was taken to enhance economic development in the south of America, which could not happen whilst it was segregated. Consequently, Bell (1980) argued that what first may have appeared to be a concerted effort to address racial inequality was in fact a decision taken in the interest of powerful White people in America:

“No such decision would have been possible without the world pressure of communism” which made it “simply impossible for the United States to continue to lead a ‘Free World’ with race segregation kept legal over a third of its territory” (W.E.B. Du Bois, 1968, cited in Bell, 2004:67).

The article in which Bell set out this argument was met with outrage and claims of cynicism (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001), but the historian Mary Dudziak (2000:107) substantiated that interest convergence exists in this case:

One need not look far to find vintage '50 Cold War ideology in primary historical documentation relating to Brown. For example, the amicus brief filed in Brown by the U.S Justice Department argued that desegregation was in the national interest in part due to foreign policy concerns.

She went on to highlight the self-interest aspect of this case:

As has been thoroughly documented by other historians, the federal government's efforts in the late 1940s and early 1950s to achieve some level of racial equality had much to do with the personal commitment on the part of some in government to racial justice, and with the consequences of civil rights policies for domestic electoral politics.

It is important to note that Bell (1980) suggested the ruling was not a quid pro quo; rather it was a prioritisation of the interests of the White middle and upper classes at the expense of Black people. This is aptly characterised by Jackson (2011:438), who argued that ‘when racial progress takes one step ahead, whites take several leaps’. Indeed, Bell (2004:7) later concluded that the Brown ruling ‘served to reinforce the fiction that, by the decision’s rejection of racial barriers posed by segregation, the path of progress would be clear’. Indeed, recently Snipes and Rodrick (2005) used the interest convergence principle in order to demonstrate that the Brown vs Board of Education case was supposed to eliminate racial

inequality in education may have represented the start of the widening of inequality in educational achievement.

In sum, interest convergence has become a powerful tool for explaining the unique circumstances in which progress towards greater racial equality can be achieved, if only temporarily and when it is in the self-interest of White people (Bell, 1980; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Delgado and Stefancic, 2000, 2001; Gillborn, 2008).

Clearly, its relevance to this thesis can only be fully understood as the evidence and arguments arise. However, at this juncture it is important to begin to set out its relationship to the data I seek to make sense of. To do so, I want to revisit the argument I set out earlier that was put forward by scholars such as Delgado (2002), Gillborn (2008) and Gillborn et al. (2016), which is that race equality goes through periods of inaction, advancement and retrenchment. Delgado (2002) accounted for this process within the context of interest convergence. Therefore, I intent to draw on interest convergence in order to explain the policy environment in education, as it too has been subject to this kind of process. I also argued that the policies enacted to advance the cause for racial equality appear to have been born out of the outrage and demands for change displayed by Black people, but that it is seldom sustained. It is possible that interest convergence may assist in explaining the circumstances under which public policy is formed and enacted that advances the conditions of Black people in society in a more sustained way. What this means is that interest convergence rejects the 'sanitized (white-washed) version of history' (Gillborn, 2005:486) that contends that public policy has been enacted in the interests of all. Instead, it offers a theory to explain an alternative view that puts race at the centre of analysis.

### **Critiquing interest convergence**

Just as CRT has been critiqued and criticised, so too has interest convergence. Litowitz (1997:523), for example, questioned the basis of interest convergence given its relationship to the Marxist ideas it originated from:

The problem with the Marxist formula was that it was a piece of pseudoscience incapable of demonstration or refutation. (...) The Marxist claim was pseudoscience because the Marxist refused to specify the evidence that would refute his claim: indeed, no evidence could disprove the claim, because any evidence against the claim was simply reinterpreted as evidence in favor of it (...). The same can be said for the much-vaunted interest convergence thesis.

Litowitz (1997) seems to have drawn his critique from Popper (2002, 2002a), who questioned the scientific basis of Marxism (or aspects of it at least) because it cannot, he claimed, be subjected to falsification. However, it is arguably the case that CRT rejects the positivist perspective that underpins this critique. For example, rather than establishing fixed laws with proof and refutations, CRT critically exposes and questions the way that racism saturates the policy process. In addition, it seems to me that proponents of interest convergence do not claim that this conceptual tool offers an absolute truth but an interpretation of incidents of policy enactment and the motives of those involved. Challenge and refutations are as acceptable here as in other areas of scholarly work. However, in order to address this critique, where I use interest convergence in this thesis to explain policy enactment, I shall seek to offer counter arguments.

Litowitz (1997) also appears to have suggested that interest convergence is in some ways a rational process, but it is often much more complex than this, as Gillborn (2010a:6) notes:

It is important to note that interest-convergence does not envisage a rational and balanced negotiation, between minoritised groups and White power holders, where change is achieved through the mere force of reason and logic. Rather, history suggests that advances in racial justice must be won, through protest and mobilisation, so that taking action against racism becomes the lesser of two evils for White interests because an even greater loss of privilege might be risked by failure to take action.

Driver (2011:164) also identified a number of problems with interest convergence. For example, he argued that it ignores what he described as ‘deep intraracial disagreements’ amongst CRT with regard to what does and does not constitute progress. Moreover, he argued that interest convergence gives rise to a narrow definition of what constitutes interest:

A central component of the interest-convergence thesis stresses the manner in which “black interests” are subordinated to “white interest”. Given that these two terms lie at the theory’s core, it is striking that Professor Bell never endeavours to define what, precisely, these mean (Driver, 2011:165).

This criticism is interesting because CRT scholars argue that, in essence, interest refers to the benefits that White people gain from permitting the advancements of Black people. For example, Delgado and Stefancic (2001:18) wrote the following:

[C]ivil rights gains for communities of Color coincide with the dictates of white self-interest. Little happens out of altruism.

Since Driver (2011) put forward his criticism, Jackson (2011:435) has addressed this issue (I drew attention to her deconstruction of self-interest earlier). She argued that a more detailed definition of interest is required if we are to understand how aspects of society benefit White people (she gives examples from laws, norms, institutional practices, and the election of Barack Obama in the US) in order to establish her argument:

[W]hile whites indeed benefit from racial hierarchy in numerous ways, a full deconstruction of racism and the collective trauma it induces must be considered with a more nuanced and disaggregated definition of ‘interest’ in mind.

There are other misconceptions in relation to the notion of self-interest. Cashin (2005), for example, argued that it is unsurprising that a social group in power would oppose policies that they perceive to be contrary to their self-interest (even if they are presented with the



moral case that suggests they should do otherwise). Yet, this claim fails to consider the full extent of the interest convergence principle, which has been shown to operate in circumstances when policy is not contrary to the interests of White people, but simply does not advance their circumstances.

Driver (2011) also argued that interest convergence ignores racial advancements, thus suggesting the statuses of Black and White people have remained unchanged since slavery. In addition, he contended that interest convergence fails to adequately account for the agency of both Black and White people so that, for example, it inadequately accounts for the struggle for advancement led by Black people and aided by white people (ibid). Closely linked to this criticism is his argument that the interest convergence principle fails to account for the decisions taken for egalitarian reasons, or where it recognises such decisions exist, claims that they were taken for alternative motives, which means that the concept is 'incapable of refutation' (Driver, 2011:165). However, CRT recognises that there have been advancements, but argues that these have been constrained or retrenched overtime.

### **Institutional racism**

CRT seeks to 'remind its readers how deeply issues of racial ideology and power continue to matter' (Crenshaw, 1995: xxxii). To do so, scholars, activists and others have used the term institutional racism as a means of describing the kind of racial discrimination I have begun to set out in this thesis. For example, I start from the premise that the education system is in and of itself institutionally racist, but also perpetuates a wider form of racial discrimination that operates across organisational structures (Troyna and Williams, 1986). Consequently, I am seeking to understand whether the policies enacted during the period this thesis is concerned with reinforced the institutional racism that already existed in the system. Therefore, I want to define the concept as it should be understood within this context and then explain why it holds such importance in this debate.

Humphrey and John are credited with introducing the concept in this country (Troyna and Williams, 1986). They defined institutional racism as 'manipulating the bureaucratic system

to outflank the unwanted' (Humphrey and John, cited in Troyna and Williams, 1986:51). They offered the planning and housing system as an example and argued that the system was manipulated in order to privilege the interests of the White majority and discriminate against their Black counterparts (ibid). Dummett (1973:131) went further and argued that institutional racism refers to 'institutions which effectively maintain inequality between members of different groups'. It is possible, however, to contend that the definition offered by William Macpherson, who chaired the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (SLI), popularised the notion of institutional racism amongst the British public. He defined it as follows:

The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people (Macpherson, 1999.para.6.34).

It was his criticism of the Metropolitan Police that gave rise to this definition. Indeed, as Pilkington (2008) argued, it was the first official recognition that institutional racism existed. It was not, however, the first salient acknowledgement of institutional racism by an apparatus of the state. It is arguably the case that came as a result of the Mangrove Nine court case in the 1970s. According to Bunce and Field (2010.para.2), this incident was 'the first judicial acknowledgement that there was "evidence of racial hatred" in the Metropolitan police'. Later, Lord Scarman (1982:209) rejected the assertion at the time that Britain was institutionally racist if the concept referred to a situation in which a society knowingly as a matter of policy discriminates against Black people.

As a result, there are positive aspects of the Macpherson conceptualisation of the term and the way in which it was popularised that makes it one of the principal definitions. It is, for example, arguably the case that the insertion of institutional racism and unwitting racism into the public's discourse has been advantageous to the debate on racism. However, several scholars have critiqued this definition. Warren (2007:374), for example, argued that this is an 'ahistorical' definition of institutional racism that also 'disengaged institutional power from

structural features of society'. Yuval Davis (1999) argued that, unlike other definitions, it brings together systematic as well as subjective racism within a single concept. In addition, Skidelsky (2000:1) contended that this definition expands the notion of racism too far that it makes it 'invulnerable to falsification'.

One of the most significant criticisms of definitions such as this is that they are almost exclusively focused on a single institution or organisational structure. Therefore, they fail to capture the form of racial discrimination that operates at a societal, rather than organisational level. This critique is offered by scholars such as Troyna and Williams (1986), who argued that the Black radicals of America used institutional racism to define what one could consider to be a societal form of racial discrimination. They insisted that, preceding its initial use, institutional racism has been reduced to simply making reference to the systems and processes within a single institution and the subsequent unequal consequences for a particular racial group. Carmichael and Hamilton (1967:4), for example, defined institutional racism as a phenomenon that operates at this higher level:

[I]nstitutional racism (...) is less overt, far more subtle, less identifiable in terms of specific individuals committing the acts. But it is no less destructive of human life (...). [It] originates in the operation of established and respected forces in the society, and thus receives far less public condemnation.

Troyna and Williams (1986:54) argued that definitions such as this emphasised the 'historical institutionalisation of racial inequalities and the perpetuation of these inequalities' and the 'interconnecting relationships of several institutional areas'. Bhavnani (2001:9) made a similar point when arguing that later definitions of institutional racism fail to capture the 'reproduction of racialised inequalities across institutions'.

Carmichael and Hamilton (1967:4) offered several examples in order to distinguish between racism and institutional racism:

When white terrorists bomb a black church and kill five black children, that is an act of individual racism (...) But when in that same city—Birmingham, Alabama—five hundred black babies die each year because of the lack of proper food, shelter and medical facilities, and thousands more are destroyed and maimed physically, emotionally and intellectually because of conditions of poverty and discrimination in the black community, that is a function of institutional racism.

There are other prominent scholars who have defined institutional racism within this societal context. Blauner (1972:185), for example, credited the report by the McCone Commission into the Los Angeles riots in 1965 with suggesting a broader definition that describes the ‘interaction of the various spheres of social life to maintain an overall pattern of oppression’.

These societal definitions of institutional racism contend that there are organisations that perpetuate a form of racial discrimination that operates beyond a single institution, which result in multiple consequences for Black and other minority groups. It is arguably the case that CRT scholars would describe this as white supremacy as they both capture a form of racial oppression that (a) is a cultural, economic and political system that affords White people power and control of the resources of a society (Ansley, 1997) and (b) represents the ‘mobilization of [the] structural and cultural forces to defend white power’ at the expense of Black and minority ethnic people (Gillborn, 2006:318). There is, however, an inherent problem with popularising a term as emotive as white supremacy (even in the context I have described). This is because it is unlikely that, given its historical connotations, it would be given any credence outside of the academic sphere and those who are sympathetic to the arguments made by CRT. It is for this reason, amongst others, that institutional racism remains a valuable concept to describe racism at this level.

### **Institutional racism and interest convergence**

The societal conceptualisation of institutional racism that I have set out above is consistent with the arguments inherent in the notion of interest convergence (i.e. Black people and their

interests are inferior and, therefore, are subordinated by the various structures in society). Carmichael and Hamilton (1967:5), for example, wrote the following:

Institutional racism relies on the active and pervasive operation of anti-black attitudes and practices. A sense of superior group position prevails: whites are "better" than blacks; therefore blacks should be subordinated to whites.

There are those, however, who question whether definitions such as those offered by Carmichael and Hamilton (1967) and Blauner (1972) have the specificity such an influential concept requires. Indeed, Mason (1982:43) argued that the definition put forward by Carmichael and Hamilton is 'pervasive and stimulating' but, as a result of the various levels at which racism operates, they are forced to shift the focus of their argument, which makes it difficult to distinguish from individual racism. In addition, he argued that similar to other definitions it lacks a clear theoretical basis (although he provides no explanation of what this means) (ibid). It is, however, questionable whether Carmichael and Hamilton (1967) were forced to shift their argument in the way Mason (1982) suggested simply because they made use of a range of examples that reflect the complexities and far-reaching consequences of institutional racism.

### **Institutional racism and education**

As I set out earlier, I start from the premise that the education system is institutionally racist. It is, however, important to note that the British education system had long been characterised as such but, as Blair et al. (1999:6) argued, the Stephen Lawrence Report (SLR) gave 'added impetus' and sparked considerable debate both within and beyond the teaching profession.

Given the literature I have set out above, as well as the arguments I have made with regard to organisational definitions of institutional racism, it is unsurprising that the literature concerned with race and education policy illustrates that some scholars have interpreted institutional racism as a societal concept, whilst others have understood it as an

organisational phenomenon. Gillborn (2002), for example, explored a form of institutional racism that operates at an organisational level. He laid bare how the institutionalising of race inequality by teachers in schools, through the way in which their informal culture and routine practices come together, results in unequal consequences for Black children. He demonstrated how teachers in the schools he studied developed a collective understanding of Black children's perceived lack of ability which confined them to, and ensured they were overrepresented in, lower GCSE examination tiers, which subsequently had an impact on their educational attainment (I return to these issues in more detail later in this chapter) (ibid). On the other hand, Graham and Robinson (2004:655) considered how schools, rather than being institutionally racist per se, have systems and processes which perpetuate what is a societal phenomenon. Their understanding is seemingly based on the early definitions of institutional racism:

Schools do not operate in a vacuum; they are institutions that reflect the social, cultural, and political configurations found in the wider society. As a result of this process, schools play a key role in the production and reproduction of power and social inequality.

Consequently, they argued that the acknowledgement of institutional racism in wider society 'demands more than the liberal discourse about the need for social justice (Graham and Robinson, 2004:659). They wrote the following:

There is now compelling research evidence that demonstrates the ways in which educational processes and structures perpetuate institutional racism (...). Despite the reluctance of many educators to engage in discussions about race, there can be no denial of the saliency of racism affecting the life chances, aspirations and opportunities of young Black people living in a racist culture (ibid).

It is important to emphasise that I am not suggesting that Gillborn (2002), or others who appear to have understood institutional racism as an organisational phenomenon, have failed to consider how racism operates at a societal level. Indeed, Gillborn (2005, 2008) has

been at the forefront of adopting the conceptualisation of white supremacy as a means of describing racism that is synonymous with societal definitions of institutional racism. However, whilst neither Gillborn (2002) nor Graham and Robinson (2004) suggested that institutional racism solely operates at an organisational or societal level, these particular articles provide examples of the different ways in which the concept is understood.

The juxtaposition of these definitions is at the crux of the critique put forward by Troyna and Williams (1986). Yet, they failed to fully identify the potential consequences of popularising either understanding of the concept over the other in the field of education and elsewhere. For example, an understanding of institutional racism solely focused at an organisational level means that, as Troyna and Williams (1986) highlighted, it is difficult to substantiate whether an organisation is entirely responsible for creating the racial inequalities they are purported to. Yet, paradoxically, an understanding of institutional racism solely focused at a societal level fails to capture the very real systematic racism that takes place at an organisational level. For instance, societal definitions make it possible for institutions to claim that, rather than being a source of racial discrimination, they inherit a wider societal problem (Blauner, 1972). Therefore, if societal definitions were to prevail it would, for example, allow teachers and officials to claim with greater authority that the underachievement of Black children is a part of a wider problem they have inherited. As a result, it would allow them to redirect blame away from schools.

It is arguably the case that this is an illustration of the possible consequences of popularising one definition (either organisational or societal). It could have a profound impact on the way in which institutional racism is understood. Moreover, whilst it is unfortunate that societal and organisational definitions have been encapsulated within the same concept, it is arguably the case that any attempt to disaggregate one from the other is a regressive and futile step, as both perspectives are of equal value to academics, activists and policy makers. Indeed, only by adopting both definitions of this concept can the research question in this thesis be thoroughly examined.

## **The perpetrator versus the victim**

Given the opposing arguments I have set out above, I now want to draw attention to several reasons why institutional racism is such an important and powerful concept when addressing issues of race and racism, whether as an organisational or societal phenomenon, as I seek to do so in this thesis. First, it assists in questioning the mainstream school of thought that considers racism to be 'rare and aberrational rather than as systemic and ingrained' (Crenshaw et al., 1995:xiv). Second, it represents a rejection of the view that racism exists but is irregular in its occurrence and limited in significance in society. Third, the establishment of its existence is a rejection of the view that racism is only carried out by 'atomistic individuals' who are 'outside of and apart from the social fabric and without historical continuity' (Freeman, 1995:30) and, therefore, are simply deviating from the normal practice of distributing power and resources on meritocratic principles (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Freeman, 1995). Consequently, institutional racism has enabled scholars and others to shift the debate away from individual behaviour and focus on the normality of racism in British society (Warren, 2007). Third, it gives scholars the language with which to challenge those who 'continue to act in racist ways while simultaneously believing that racism no longer exists' (Mutua, 2006:385).

The perpetrator versus victim model (Freeman, 1995) is a good illustration of these arguments in practice. According to Freeman (1995), the dominant, liberal perpetrator perspective considers racial discrimination to be a series of actions that are inflicted on a victim by a perpetrator. In this process of thought one is, therefore, primarily concerned with the racist actions of the perpetrator. As a result, in order to address this kind of racial discrimination, the neutralisation of the perpetrator's inappropriate conduct is the right measure. However, Freeman (1995:29) argued that the victim's perspective starts from the premise that 'racial discrimination describes those conditions of actual social existence as a member of a perpetual underclass':



This perspective includes both the objective conditions of life (lack of jobs, lack of money, lack of housing) and the consciousness associated with those objective conditions (lack of choice and lack of human individuality in being forever perceived as a member of a group rather than as an individual). (...) The victim, or "condition" conception of racial discrimination suggests that the problem will not be solved until the conditions associated with it have been eliminated (ibid).

This means that the victim's perspective focuses on the social and economic consequences of racism and, therefore, enables appropriate consideration to be afforded to the way in which institutional racism at a societal level operates in order to discriminate against Black and other ethnic minority groups.

This debate is at the centre of my critique of the way in which public policy is enacted. What I mean by this is that this thesis considers the intention of policy enactment, but also affords appropriate consideration to the consequences of it (i.e. the effect policy enactment may have had on the attainment of Black children).

### **Race, education and research in England**

As I set out at the beginning, this thesis is principally concerned with educational achievement in England. As a result, I want to briefly set out some of the arguments contained within the research in this area.

The education system has a long history of racially discriminating against Black children. Wright (2010:22), for example, described the circumstances Black children face as 'systematic institutional discriminatory practices'. It is this, he argued, that has given rise to underachievement and a disproportionate rate of school exclusions, which is an issue I will return to later in this chapter. Yet, despite this long history of racism, the problem failed to be afforded attention in the public policy arena. Historically, for example, with the possible exception of some discussion about the dispersal of Black children in some local areas, which left them vulnerable to racist attacks, policies specifically concerned with this group

were 'on the margins' (Gillborn et al. 2016:4) of education policy or even absent altogether (Kirp, 1992; Gillborn, 2003; Gillborn et al., 2016). Instead, issues concerning race were integrated into non-specific policy areas such as assimilation and later integration, language provision, educational disadvantage and other social factors (Kirp, 1992; Gillborn, 2003, 2016a). It was not until the 1970s and 1980s as multiculturalists and anti-racists became more influential that racial discrimination was given prominence in education (Archer and Francis, 2005). As I set out earlier, the body of research produced by scholars such as Bernard Coard was critical in drawing attention to this issue and forming the basis of 'a struggle for educational opportunities' (Wright, 2010:22) that ensured racial inequality was afforded greater saliency. Other critical developments included the Inner London Education Authority's (ILEA) work in 1968 that substantiated the existence of educational underachievement amongst Black children in London and its decision to publish a policy statement on multiculturalism in 1977 (Troyna, 1984). Together, actions such as those I have set out precipitated what is now an increasing body of academic evidence in support of the view that racism is endemic in the education system, as it is elsewhere in society, and that the educational underachievement of Black children was just one of the consequences of this discrimination. Yet, this body of research continued despite the emergence of the colour-blind approach from the late 1980s (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000).

### **Underachievement**

Whilst there have been disagreements amongst scholars in relation to defining underachievement, it is arguably the case that in this area of work it often denotes the gap in attainment between a group of concern (which is often a poorly performing group of children) and the average educational achievement of all children or that of another significant social group (Gorard, 2000). Therefore, the achievement gap, which refers to the 'index of the difference in an educational indicator' (Gorard, 2000:391), is used to describe the disparity in educational attainment between groups of children (Taylor, 1981; Troyna, 1984; Gillborn and Mirza, 2000; Gorard, 2000; Chambers, 2017). Whilst it is the case that there have been those who have advocated deviations from this understanding (see Gorard, 2000) Conservative and Labour governments, as well as many academics and activists, have

chosen to define it in this context. However, the concept has been the subject of various interpretations. Indeed, somewhat paradoxically, the very notion of underachievement has become for some ethnic minorities what Gillborn and Mirza (2000:7) described as a 'pervasive discourse of despair', which is due to the term being misappropriated. For instance, in explaining why Black children underachieve, the concept has become a means of attributing the blame for Black children's underachievement on the children themselves, their families and communities (Gillborn and Mirza, 2000; Archer and Francis, 2007). This is consistent with the deficit model of thinking I referred to earlier and has the effect of deflecting the cause away from schools and the education system more widely. Furthermore, as Archer and Francis (2007:1) argued, this discourse 'effectively denies racism as a potential cause of differences in achievement and hides inequalities within congratulatory public statements'.

In addition to this, according to Gillborn and Mirza (2000:7), critics have argued that attempts to problematise the underachievement of Black children undermines the desire of this group to succeed, by masking their true achievements, as well as their 'alternative educational practice'. Such an assertion must be rejected based on the very nature of what it is scholars in this area seek to achieve (i.e. to draw attention to the extent of the problem and uncover and expose its causes).

## **Two schools of thought**

Much of the research concerned with race and education seeks to establish *why* Black children underachieve. In doing so, it has given rise to two main schools of thought<sup>11</sup>. The first is predicated on the view that Black children are 'the source of 'the problem' and the potential 'cure'' (Archer and Francis, 2005:388). What this means is that this school of thought contends that the underachievement of Black children is the result of (a) the poor

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<sup>11</sup> I have deliberately chosen to discount the pseudo-scientific body of work, which has been deconstructed and then thoroughly discredited by CRT (see, for example, Delgado 1998; Gillborn and Youdell, 2000; Gillborn, 2008, 2016a; Bell, 2016), such as 'IQist' notion of innate intelligence (Gillborn, 2003:13), hereditarianism and 'genetic determinism' (Gillborn, 2016:366) that seeks to establish the view that Black people are biologically inferior.

attitudes, values and actions of Black children and their families and/or (b) the inadequate social, economic and environmental circumstances Black families find themselves in. As a result, their underachievement can be explained by their supposed low aspirations, social class (such as poverty), the poor family structures they live in and the parenting they receive (Sewell, 1997, 2000, 2001; Strand, 2011). This school of thought can, therefore, be thought of as the 'pathological interpretation' (Troyna, 1984:157) that is consistent with the deficit model of thinking I referred to earlier, or what Wright (2010:22) characterised as the 'cultural deficit' explanation.

The opposing school of thought has, through academic research, sought to reject such arguments. Scholars in this school of thought have argued that, for example, negative perceptions and low expectations of Black children, and the policies they give rise to, are the principal causes of the underachievement experienced by this group. Indeed, Gillborn (2008, 2008a) questioned whether, given that racism is not random (Ladson-Billings, 2013) the enactment of education policy amounts to a conspiracy (i.e. individual actors and institutions function in such ways that they 'embody, legitimize and sustain White racial hegemony' (Gillborn, 2008a:245).

Many scholars have used their research in order to draw attention to the various ways in which, over time, academics, teachers and other professionals working in and with schools have considered Black children to be academically inferior, less able and/or less ambitious than their counterparts and, as a consequence, schools have treated them adversely (Fuller, 1984; Mac an Ghail, 1988; Mac an Ghail, 1989; Gillborn and Youdell, 2000; Sewell, 2000; Youdell, 2003; Graham and Robinson, 2004; Tikly et al., 2006; Archer and Francis, 2007; Rollock, 2007, 2007a; Gillborn, 2008; Gillborn et al., 2012; Rollock et al., 2015). For example, there is research which suggests that Black children are disproportionately categorised as having Special Educational Needs (particularly in terms of behavioural and emotional needs) (Lindsay et al., 2006; Tinson et al., 2017). In addition, studies in the UK and US have found Black children are disproportionately placed in lower ability groups, or what Taylor et al. (2017:237) defined as 'attainment grouping', as the term ability is often confused with

arguably dangerous notions of innate academic potential, such as sets and streams<sup>12</sup> (Wright, 1985; Foster, 1990; Donelan et al., 1994; Gillborn and Youdell, 2000; Oakes, 2005). This is significant because policies that enact attainment groupings, as well as the systems in and of themselves, have a negative effect on the children in the lower groups (Brunello and Checchi, 2007; Gillborn, 2008; OECD, 2012; EEF, 2017; Taylor et al., 2017). For example, in its review of research in this area, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (2017.para.3) found that attainment groupings benefit high attaining children and work to the detriment of their middle and low attaining counterparts. The EEF (2017.para.4) also argued that these policies 'undermine low attainers' confidence and discourage the belief that attainment can be improved through effort', as well as impact negatively on children's attitudes and engagement. In addition to this, setting and streaming policies have been found to exacerbate inequities if they are enacted early (i.e. in primary school and the early stages of secondary education) without raising performance (OECD, 2012).

Several studies have illustrated that teachers have lower expectations of Black children because they judge the parents of this group to be less ambitious for their children (Gillborn and Mirza, 2000; Youdell, 2003; Archer and Francis, 2005; Rollock et al., 2015). This is in contrast to, for example, teachers' perceptions of Chinese children who are seen as deriving from superior family structures with a culture that values education (Archer and Francis, 2005). This is often referred to as 'the discourse of model minority' (Gillborn, 2008:146; Wong, 2015:731), which is an issue I return to again in chapter 5.

This academic research not only acts as an explanation for why Black children underachieve, but also represents a strong counter-narrative to the former school of thought I referred to above. At various stages in this thesis, I draw on research from this school of thought.

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<sup>12</sup> Setting involves children being grouped in individual subjects on the basis of, for example, their perceived ability or prior attainment, whilst streaming refers to grouping children on a similar basis but for the majority or all subjects (Taylor et al., 2017).

## **Measuring the attainment gap**

In addition to problematising why Black children underachieve, some scholars have also sought to understand the extent of the problem. Over time, academics such as Gillborn and Gipps (1996), Gillborn and Mirza (2000) and Gillborn et al. (2016) have shown that attainment gaps between certain ethnic groups (including Black children) have remained significant. Furthermore, research carried out by Rollock et al. (2015) has illustrated that Black middle class families have experienced racism (such as low expectations) in the same way Black working class families have (thus representing a rejection of the argument that the problem of underachievement is one of social class as opposed to race). However, scholars such as Strand (2014) and Gorard (2000) have sought to dismiss the extent of underachievement amongst Black children. By controlling for key variables such as the economic circumstances of families, Strand (2014) has argued that, for example, the poorest White British students are the lowest achieving group. In addition, and as I will discuss in more detail in chapter 6, Strand (2014) and others have also re-defined (or at least extended) the notion of underachievement. However, research by Gillborn (2010), Rollock et al. (2015) and Gillborn et al. (2016) have presented robust counter-narratives to such arguments.

## **School exclusions**

The disproportionate number of Black children excluded from English schools each year is a further area of research that has been the subject of attention by scholars. For example, in the academic year 2015/16, Black children had the highest rates of fixed term exclusions (alongside their Mixed Race counterparts) and Black Caribbean children were more than three times more likely to be permanently excluded than the school population as a whole (DfE, 2017). It is not the principal focus of this research, so I will not set out the literature in any detail. However, it is clear that the underachievement of Black children and the disproportionate number of school exclusions they receive are related to each other and, therefore, requires some consideration. It is arguably the case that, for example, fixed term exclusions (i.e. being prohibited from attending school on a temporary basis), but in particular permanent exclusions (i.e. being expelled), are part of the reason why Black

children underachieve. Some scholars have argued that it is, for example, the over-disciplinary or unequal measures used by teachers within schools against Black children that often results in disproportionate levels of school exclusions (Kulz, 2014; DfE, 2017; CERD, 2016; Gillborn, 2016, 2016a) and poor teacher to student and/or parent relationships (Harris and Wright, 1985; Mac an Ghail, 1988; Gillborn, 1990; Major, 2003; Parsons, 2003; Graham and Robinson, 2004; Carlile, 2012; CERD, 2016; Gillborn, 2016, 2016a). Sewell (2007:103), for example, argued that Black boys are seen as 'rebellious, phallogentric underachievers'. It is for reasons such as this that some scholars have attributed the problem to institutional racism (Major, 2003; John, 2006; Carlile, 2011). Indeed, even the New Labour government recognised that institutional racism was a contributing factor to the disproportionate number of Black children excluded from school (DfES, 2006a).

There are those, however, who have been highly critical of any explanation that is predicated on the view that racism is the cause of this problem, let alone institutional racism. Sewell (2010:16), for example, contended that the Department for Education<sup>13</sup> (DfE) took the 'easy route' by attributing the problem to institutional racism when, in his view, the real cause was 'family life, peer pressure and anti-school culture'. However, several scholars have rejected such conclusions and contended that arguments put forward such as that by Sewell (2010) fail to recognise and account for the dynamics of Black families; this includes their positive social and cultural capital (Mirza and Reay, 2000; Cork, 2005; Gillborn, 2008; Reynolds, 2010; Wright, 2010; Rollock et al., 2015). I return to the issue of school exclusion in chapter 7 in relation to the policies schools enact to raise standards.

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<sup>13</sup> The Department for Education (DfE) is a part of the central state bureaucracy. It is led by Ministers (chiefly its Secretary of State) but staffed by permanent employees. It has responsibility for children's services and education in England. It has, over time, been given a range of names (almost always with the word education included) and policies and services to oversee. For the purposes of this thesis, I have referred to this part of the state bureaucracy as the Department for Education (this is for clarity and consistency purposes). Therefore, although under New Labour this part of the state had various titles (i.e. the Department for Education & Employment, the Department for Education & Skills and the Department for Children, Schools & Families), I have referred to it throughout as the Department for Education or DfE.

Throughout this thesis, I will draw on the research concerned with race that I have highlighted in this section and those preceding it, in order to assist me in drawing conclusions from the data. However, it is important to make clear from the outset that the measurement of achievement (and, therefore, underachievement) is a complex issue that, as I have briefly drawn attention to, is vigorously contested (Archer and Francis, 2007:xiii; Gillborn et al., 2016).

### **Policy as an obstacle**

In the previous section, I drew attention to some of the main arguments concerned with race and the English education system. I want to continue to do so here, but focus on some of the specific research findings that scholars have uncovered which underpin the conclusions I have arrived at in this thesis. This research is concerned with exploring why Black children underachieve, but it has arrived at its conclusions as a result of examining the policies enacted in schools that have been informed and legitimised by the policies of successive governments.

The most seminal work carried out in this area was conducted by Gillborn and Youdell (2000), but has also been considered by Gillborn (2005, 2008), Kutnick et al. (2005), Chambers (2009), Roberts-Holmes (2014) and, in brief, by several other scholars (Rollock, 2007, 2007a; Ball et al., 2012, 2012a; Kulz, 2014). Gillborn and Youdell (2000:43) conducted research in three secondary schools in England (two of which were in London) and found that these schools operated what the scholars described as an 'A-C economy' (i.e. a political and policy environment in which the performance of schools are judged on the percentage of children attaining five GCSEs at grade C). They found that, as a means of maximising results, the schools enacted policies that involved 'educational rationing' (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000:13). They found that schools established what they likened to an 'educational triage' (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000:14) that effectively limited the resources and educational opportunities (such as extra tuition, additional attention from teachers and added scrutiny of their progress) available to a privileged group of children. In each school, this was the group of children that were predicted to underachieve by a single grade (i.e. attain a grade D



instead of a C) in one or more subjects required to meet the headline performance measure but, according to staff in these schools, had the potential to attain the required standard if they were afforded the educational resources and opportunities I referred to above. As a result, this very specific group of children were considered 'suitable for treatment' (ibid).

This policy also gave rise to two further groups. They were the 'safe' group (i.e. those children who were deemed 'non-urgent cases' because they were already predicted to achieve the grades required) and the group 'without hope' (i.e. those children who were considered 'hopeless cases' in terms of realising the grades required) (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000:134). In later work, Rollock (2007, 2007a) noted the existence of such categorisations based on teachers' judgement of success. She identified that there were two forms of achievement in schools, which she described as 'inclusive success' (i.e. the attainment of D to G grades at GCSE and/or development in personal skills) and 'exclusive success' (i.e. attainment of A\* to C grades at GCSE) (Rollock, 2007:199). In addition, Roberts-Holmes (2014) found a similar process of selection in early years education.

This educational triage had the effect of rationing the resources and opportunities available to the two groups that were not a priority in what Ball et al. (2012a:520) described as 'systematic neglect of others'. This is significant because, as Gillborn and Youdell (2000) demonstrated, policies such as educational triage have an impact on the exams children are entered for and, potentially, their attainment. In addition, whilst the evidence is debated and contested (DfE, 2017e), some research suggests that, to varying degrees, resource allocation can affect attainment (Nicoletti and Rabe, 2012; DfE, 2017e).

What is of particular concern in the context of this thesis is that Gillborn and Youdell (2000) found that Black children were less likely to be in the 'safe' group and over-represented in the group 'without hope', whilst their counterparts enjoyed increased educational opportunities. Indeed, they arrived at the following conclusion:

Pupils thought to possess 'ability' (on the basis of a previous test score and/or in relation to social criteria) are given a second chance to fulfil their privileged destinies

through the mobilization of higher teacher expectations and additional resources (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000:164).

This suggests that practices such as educational triage have created what Ball et al. (2012a:526) described as an 'economy of student worth', which means that some children hold more value in the education system than others. As a consequence, schools compete in order to attract children with the most value (i.e. those deemed capable of 'adding value' in terms of their capability to attain the headline measure at the least cost) (Ball et al., 2012a; Bailey and Ball, 2016:144). Ball et al. (2012:526) arrived at the following conclusion in relation to the triage practices they discovered in their study:

[P]atterns of systemic neglect are based on and perpetuate an internal economy of student worth, a literal economy which values individual students differently and rations educational opportunities accordingly.

Bailey and Ball (2016) argued that the children of high value are largely middle class, as they 'pose less risk' to schools in terms of results and are less likely to require additional (often expensive) time and resources. However, the research by Gillborn and Youdell (2000) suggests that they are also less likely to be Black. On several occasions in this thesis, I will return to this notion that an internal economy of student worth exists in the education system (particularly in chapters 6 and 7 when I consider why the intensification of school accountability and the policies this may have given rise to may have led to improvements in the attainment of some Black children).

The final point I wish to make here with regards to research in this area is that, not only does it offer an explanation for why Black children underachieve, but it does so by demonstrating how national policy connects to those enacted in schools, which in turn leads to discriminatory effects on the grounds of race (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000; Ball et al., 2012). Gillborn and Youdell (2000:204), for example, wrote the following:

One of the most important aspects of our analysis of educational triage concerns the relationship it exposes between national education policy and of selection at the school level. The schools' reactions are driven by the need to survive in the context of competition created and enforced by the school league tables.

This is relevant because, in undertaking this thesis, I have attempted to continue this approach in my analysis of education policy between 1997 and 2017, in order to draw attention to this important connectivity.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have sought to explain what CRT is and set out its main insights. I have argued that it is concerned with the racial discrimination experienced by Black and other minority groups, both ideologically and materially. In particular, I have argued that CRT (with interest convergence being one of its principal tools) focuses on the way in which White people hold racist ideas, embed those ideas into the structures of society and then use the power of institutions (such as the legal and the education systems) to racially discriminate against Black and other minority groups. I then set out the conceptual tool of interest convergence, which is concerned with explaining the limited circumstances (beyond those presented by people in power) that lead to the enactment of policies and changes in the law that advance the interest of Black people. I argued that this principal tenet of CRT can assist in establishing whether there is evidence to suggest that the increase in Black children's attainment was the result of, and can be explained by, interest convergence.

I then set out some of the scholarly work with regard to institutional racism. I drew attention to two of the main ways in which scholars have argued that this concept should be understood. Consequently, I argued that it is a concept that remains essential to articulating racial discrimination that operates at an organisational and societal level and that I will, therefore, use it in order to establish whether policy enactment during the period of time this thesis is concerned with represents racial discrimination consistent with the way in which it has been conceptualised in this thesis.

In the final part of this chapter, I focused on race and education and briefly set out some of the existing research in this area and drew attention to the work of Gillborn and Youdell (2000) and others that underpins the conclusions I will reach in this thesis.

### **3. Public Service Reform**

[W]e are all deeply implicated in, and bound up and into, the contemporary neo-liberal and globalising settlement and its triumph is that most of the time we do not even notice it is there.

Stephen Ball, Meg Maguire & Annette Braun (2012:139)

[T]he biggest societal, political and economic reforms do not fit into neat five-year electoral cycles. They take decades. And what feels like a seismic shift in the short term, may merely be a footnote in the long run

David Bell (2015.para.7)

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I will set out the second strand of scholarly work that underpins this thesis. It is concerned with explaining how successive governments have sought to operate and improve public services in England. I will argue that the work to improve the education system (in particular raising educational attainment) has been informed by, aligned to and a manifestation of neoliberalism. I will, therefore, set out neoliberalism as it is presented by its advocates, but also offer a critique of this ideology. Subsequently, I will argue that, alongside CRT, neoliberalism can assist me in explaining why, during the period this thesis is concerned with: (a) the attainment of Black children as a group increased, at a time when racial equality was de-prioritised as a problem and institutional racism remained a significant issue; (b) large numbers of Black children continued to underachieve; and (c) there was inaction and then retrenchment on addressing racial inequality in the education system as a specific problem.

## **Reforming public services**

Given the literature I have set out in the previous chapter, it is clear that any analysis of education policy must give consideration to race and race inequality. This is not just the perspective of CRT scholars, but other academics, too. Apple (1999:10), for example, wrote the following:

It would not be possible to understand the history, current status, and multiple effects of educational policy in the UK without placing race as a core element of one's analysis.

With the formation of each new government comes the almost inevitable claim that its approach to improving public services will be superior to the last. One new prime minister after another announces with great pride and unequivocal conviction that his or her government has listened and learned from the mistakes of the previous incumbent and will, therefore, offer a radically different approach to the challenges the country faces. Their intention is clear: to signal to the country that a new course has been set, which will lead to better public services and a better future.

'Public Service Reform' (Alldritt et al., 2009:1; Cabinet Office, 2006:3), or what is also referred to as 'Public Sector Reform' (Ball, 2007:17) is, therefore, an increasingly critical part of the work carried out by governments. Reforming public services is presented as a process of changing the way public services (those funded and/or managed by the state) operate. Reforms can, for example, be enacted in order to (a) improve the effectiveness of a service (such as reducing hospital waiting times), (b) secure better economic efficiency (such as cutting expenditure on out of work benefits), or (c) realign (alter) the role or functions a public service carries out (such as extending the role of Ofsted to inspect early years and childcare provision). Yet, whilst this process of change might at first appear to be simply a managerial model of public service delivery, it is arguably the case that the patterned nature of these reforms suggests that, over time, they have fundamentally changed the way in which public services are conceptualised and delivered. One must, however, question

whether what is presented as a process for improving public services is in fact a means by which the status quo of racial discrimination and inequality is maintained and entrenched. This is an issue I shall return to, but at this juncture I want to focus on the approach several governments have adopted in England.

In 2010, for example, the Coalition government moved quickly to set out the incoming administration's joint 'programme for government' (HM Government, 2010:1). It included several commitments to reforming public services:

[I]n the NHS, take Conservative thinking on markets, choice and competition and add to it the Liberal Democrat belief in advancing democracy at a much more local level, and you have a united vision for the NHS that is truly radical: GPs with authority over commissioning; patients with much more control; elections for your local NHS health board (HM Government, 2010:8).

However, this approach (i.e. enacting markets, choice and competition policies in the public sector) is not new. The Coalition government inherited it from its predecessor, New Labour, who received it from the Conservatives. In a Cabinet Office document published in its second term in office, the New Labour government sought to present its own approach (see figure 4):

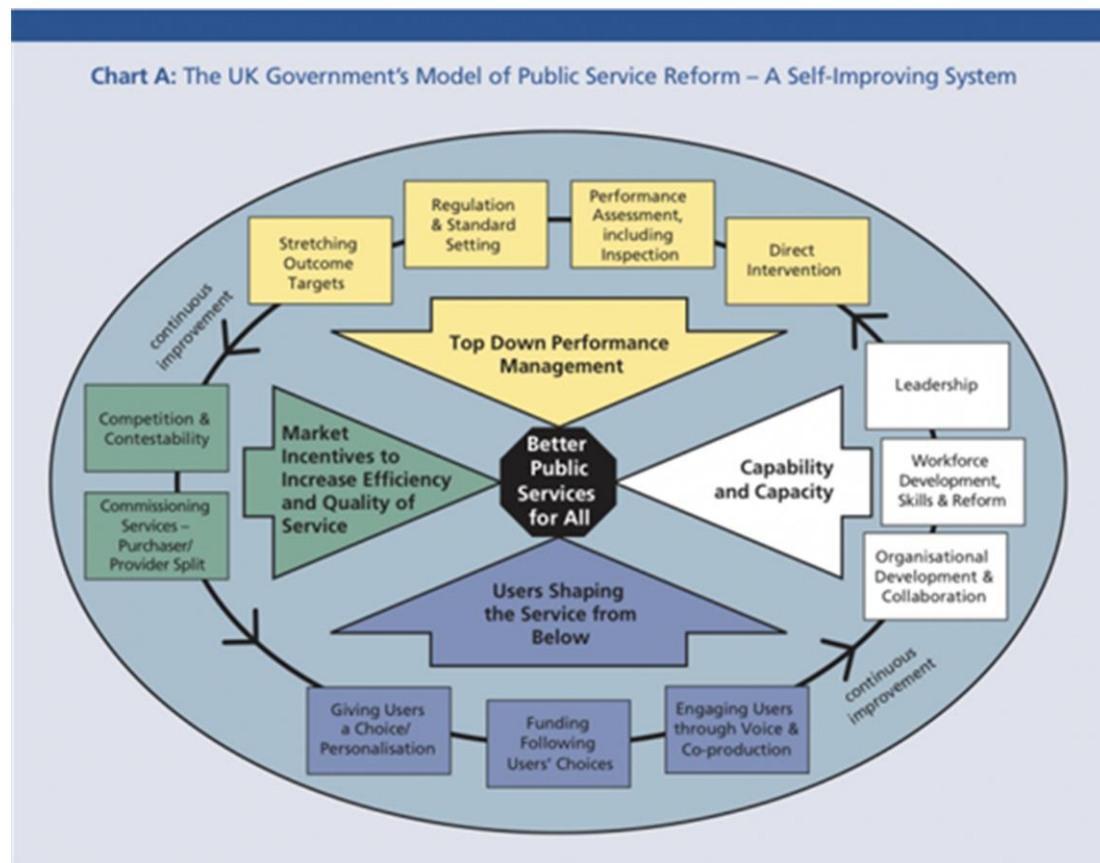
[P]ressure from government (top down performance management); pressure from citizens (choice and voice), competitive provision; and measures to build the capability and capacity of civil and public servants and central and local government Cabinet Office (2006:3).

## **Neoliberalism**

The approach adopted by New Labour, which is almost identical to that pursued by the Coalition, predates this government and its successor (Alldritt et al., 2009). It appears to

have been informed by the intellectual and political ideology of 'neoliberalism' (Friedman, 1951:91). In the previous chapter, I began to set out the critique of liberalism offered by CRT.

**Figure 4: The UK Government's Model of Public Service Reform**



Source: Cabinet Office (2006:3)

I have adopted this critique and intend to pursue it in this thesis, but it is arguably the case that there are substantive differences between the liberalism CRT scholars have critiqued and the neoliberalism I have referred to above (Olssen, 1996; Apple, 2004; Crouch, 2011). Therefore, I want to briefly set out some of those differences.

In the US and Europe, for example, liberalism is in part associated with the promotion of civil liberties (Crouch, 2011). For instance, in the nineteenth century, the liberal thinker John Stuart Mill (1869:7) sought to understand 'the nature and limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual'. Today, liberals seek to address similar



questions in relation to public policy. One may, therefore, consider this perspective to be social liberalism. Economically, however, the liberalism in the US and Europe are different. In the US, liberalism is sceptical of the free market and advocates government intervention into this area (Crouch, 2011). In Europe, however, liberalism is a manifestation of political ideas that promote the dominance of the free market and less government intervention (Giddens, 2003; Crouch, 2011). There are those who have attempted to bind social and economic liberalism together. For example, the former Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg (2016:50), sought to do so in his characterisation of 'liberal Britain':

[There are] great swathe of British society which believes in fairness, which is open to innovation, liberal in its instincts about lifestyle choices, internationalist in outlook, concerned about long-term challenges like climate change, and modern and hard-headed in its attitude towards the economy (Clegg, 2016:50).

One can surmise that his reference to being 'hard-headed' (ibid) refers to the economic liberalism I have referred to. However, there are indeed key ideas that connect social and economic liberalism. The most pronounced concerns the status of the individual. The concepts of 'negative freedom' and 'positive freedom', which were conceptualised by Berlin (1971:122) and the ideas of Mill (1869), may assist one in explaining this. Social and economic liberalism appear to advocate individual liberty, but social liberalism seems to orientate itself towards (a) 'political liberties' (Mill, 1869:9), which describes the 'immunities' (ibid) that cannot be infringed upon (i.e. freedom from being prevented by another human from attaining a goal) (Berlin, 1971:122) and (b) 'equality of liberty', which refers to the notion that one should not be treated by others in ways that they themselves would not wish to be treated (Berlin, 1971:125). They should, for example, have freedom from surveillance, such as the state being granted access to personal emails. These are examples of what Mill (1869:13) may have characterised as 'tyrannizing' the individual. Economic liberalism, on the other hand, appears to be more concerned with positive freedom or 'aspirational individualism' (Kulz, 2014:698), which is the 'wish to be a subject, not an object' (Berlin, 1971:131). This means the individual is in control of his or her own decisions, as opposed to

being subject to those of another individual (ibid). For example, it advocates one's ability (indeed right) to maximise their self-interest.

These are not, of course, binary positions. Indeed, as I will illustrate, economic liberalism's rejection of state involvement in many aspects of social and economic affairs may reside from its considered position on civil liberties. Yet, it is arguably the case that, whilst social and economic liberalism share key ideas such as the position of the individual, there are clear distinctions that one can (and indeed must) consider (Olssen, 1996). As a result, in this thesis I have chosen to adopt the concept of neoliberalism in order to mark out this distinction. Moreover, I will also go further and contend that neoliberalism is a distinct form of liberalism that has become a 'social market doctrine' (Gamble, 1979:5) or what Lipman (2011:6) defined as 'an ensemble of economic and social policies, forms of governance, and discourses and ideologies' that has informed the enactment of public policy in England and other countries for over 30 years (Olssen, 1996; Giddens, 2003; Apple, 2004; Crouch, 2011; Lipman, 2011; Jones, 2014). Not too dissimilar to Ball (2012a:3), I am hesitant in using the term neoliberalism because it is 'used so widely and so loosely that it is in danger of becoming meaningless'. Indeed, Venugopal (2015:165) argued that it has become 'a deeply problematic and incoherent term that has multiple and contradictory meanings. It is, therefore, important to point out that there are various forms of neoliberalism. Certainly, what I will describe in this thesis as neoliberalism, Apple (2004:15) defines as a 'compromise' between the competing discourses of neoliberalism, neo-conservatism, religious conservatism and middle class adherents to managerialism. Therefore, I will use the concept of neoliberalism in this thesis, but recognise that there are different versions and, moreover, no agreement on what precise set of ideas they advocate.

Notwithstanding this, the literature suggests that the most prominent versions of neoliberalism argue that free markets provide the most appropriate means for people to satisfy their aspirations, so individuals use this economic structure to maximise their material self-interest. Indeed, the Prime Minister at the time of writing stated, '[a] free market economy (...) is the greatest agent of collective human progress ever created' (May, 2017a.para.44). Neoliberalism also contends that the market (including unrestricted flows of

capital and reductions in the cost of labour) is preferable to the state, which is inefficient and a potential threat to individual freedoms. It is for this reason 'sharp retrenchment of the public sphere' (Lipman, 2011:6) is required, which will also create new, profitable opportunities for the private sector (Olssen, 1996; Crouch, 2011; Lipman, 2011; Ball, 2012a; Jones, 2014). In sum, therefore, neoliberalism is as follows:

[A] free market ideology based on individual liberty and limited government that connected human freedom to the actions of the rational, self-interested actor in the competitive marketplace (Jones, 2014:2).

Milton Friedman (1951:91) redefined how neoliberalism is understood when setting out some of the guiding principles of this ideology:

Neo-liberalism would accept the nineteenth century liberal emphasis on the fundamental importance of the individual, but it would substitute for the nineteenth century goal of laissez-faire as a means to this end, the goal of the competitive order. It would seek to use competition among producers to protect consumers from exploitation, competition among employers to protect workers and owners of property, and competition among consumers to protect the enterprises themselves. The state would police the system, establish conditions favorable to competition and prevent monopoly, provide a stable monetary framework, and relieve acute misery and distress. The citizens would be protected against the state by the existence of a free private market; and against one another by the preservation of competition.

It appears, therefore, that neoliberalism is concerned with (a) macroeconomics, in the form of monetarism, (b) microeconomics in terms of deregulation of industry and the liberalisation of financial markets and (c) private ownership, in relation to industry and public services. These ideas are drawn from the work of scholars such as Friedrich von Hayek (2001), Milton Friedman (1951, 1955, 1962), Ludwig von Mises (1944; 1988) and James Buchanan (Buchanan and Tullock, 2011). Their ideas were popularised by organisations such as the Mont Pelerin Society (see, for example, Butler, no date; Jones, 2014).

## **A social market doctrine**

As a dominant 'social market doctrine' (Gamble, 1979:5), neoliberalism stands out as a distinct form of liberalism. It is concerned with the pre-eminence of markets, but its prominence derives from the way in which it '[applies] free-market economic principles to non-economic problems' (Fisher-Ari et al., 2017:256). It is, in effect, concerned with what Ball (2012a:3) described as the 'economisation of social life', or what Matthew Clarke (2012:298) characterised as the 'economising agenda'. What I mean by this is that it is a 'coherent, if loose, body of ideas' (Jones, 2014:19) that has sought to redefine the settled approach to economic and social policy adopted by governments since the second World War (Olssen, 1996; Kavanagh, 1985; Alldritt et al., 2009; Apple, 2004). It began as an intellectual ideology (see, for example, Butler, no date; Hayek, 2001), but then developed into its current political form as it gained prominence from the 1980s onwards in the US and the UK and then in nations around the world (Giddens, 2003; Jones, 2014).

How exactly neoliberalism, which was at first an obscure, even dangerous right-wing concept, became a global conceptual model of thinking cannot be discussed within the limits of this thesis (Apple, 2004; Clarke, 2016). However, given that understanding its dominance in society is important to this thesis, it is worth briefly highlighting two key factors that assisted in it gaining traction. The first is the party political support neoliberalism garnered in the UK, but also in nations such as the U.S.. In the UK, for example, it was the former Conservative Cabinet Minister Keith Joseph, who has been described as Margaret Thatcher's political guru (Clarke, 2016:91), who is credited with playing an influential role in the enactment of neoliberal policies (Ball, 2007; Kavanagh, 1985, 1987). It was also driven by politicians such as Margaret Thatcher and Geoffrey Howe, who capitalised on the economic difficulties of the 1970s (Butler, no date; Jones, 2014; Kavanagh, 1985). Indeed, the economic and social policy position outlined by politicians such as Joseph came to define neoliberalism in the UK. Ball (2007:18) wrote the following:

This rested on a rejection of extensive state regulation, high taxation, high levels of public spending, borrowing and subsidies, and the role of unions as monopoly

suppliers of labour, and argued generally that the public sector was a drain on the wealth-creating private sector. What was needed was 'more market, less state' - deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation.

As Matthew Clarke (2012:297) argued, '[t]he relationship between policy and politics is marked by mutual imbrications', which may in part explain why neoliberalism has gained consensus across the political spectrum and acquired 'exalted status' (Harvey, 2007:21).

The second supposition is that the media played a defining role in inculcating neoliberalism in the public realm (McChesney, 2001; Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2013; Phelan, 2014, 2014a). McChesney (2001), for example, argued that economic and cultural globalisation would be impossible without a global commercial media system. One could, therefore, think of the media in the context of what the Marxist scholar Louis Althusser (2006:92) characterised as an 'ideological state apparatus' (i.e. a public or private organisation that conveys the dominant ideology).

It is arguably the case, therefore, that the influence of the media is profound. Indeed, the former Cabinet Minister, Kenneth Clarke, stated the media has acquired 'more power than Westminster' (Clarke, 2016:60). Their role is not only relevant to explaining the popularisation of neoliberalism, however, but the stalled and often retrenchment in race equality in this neoliberal society. For example, Bell (1992:5) cited 'media nurtured public opinion' as a barrier to racial progress, whilst Delgado (2001:2285) contended that 'media images of blacks shift according to social need', which is in itself a problem. Furthermore, Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2013:590) argued that the media operates in a way that sets the parameters in which neoliberal policies are endorsed or otherwise and, in doing so, has 'distorting consequences for measuring and understanding educational inequality'. For example, the data in chapter 5 suggest that the media played a defining role in mobilising a backlash against the perception that the attainment of Black children was a government priority. In addition, they played a decisive role in galvanising the White middle class to exercise the benefits of Whiteness (such as successfully demanding that successive governments acted to improve education in London) by promoting the neoliberal agenda.

## **The normalisation of neoliberalism**

It is possible to contend that the political and media traction neoliberalism has gained means that it has become 'a new social imaginary' (Lipman, 2011:6). This refers to the way we imagine our world and the 'common sense' way of enacting public policy and, moreover, organising society (Olssen, 1996; Giddens, 2003; Apple, 2004; Taylor, 2004; Crouch, 2011; Lipman, 2011; Jones, 2014).

I want to offer three examples in order to illustrate this. First, the former Labour Prime Minister, Tony Blair argued that choice policies (a central idea advanced by neoliberalism that I will set out in more detail below), was not only a central tenant of the Conservative agenda but that of New Labour, too:

Sometimes I hear people describe "choice" as a Tory word. (...) Choice a Tory word? Tell that to (...) the parents who have made the new City Academy Schools so popular in areas of the greatest social disadvantage. Choice is not a Tory word (Blair, 2004. no pagination).

Second, the financial crisis of 2007/08 which, arguably, was in part the result of the unbridled commitment to neoliberalism, is significant as it took place after ten years of a Labour administration. Indeed, as Jones (2014:19) argued, despite a brief resurrection of a Keynesian approach to assist the recovery, 'the dominant impulse of the government was to 'return to the pre-2007 status quo rather than to attempt a root-and-branch reform'. Third, many of the education policies advocated by neoliberalism in countries such as England, Australia and New Zealand have been enacted by progressive parties (Whitty, 2002; Bailey and Ball, 2016).

The reason I have drawn attention to these specific examples is that they concern the actions of New Labour and other progressive governments, when neoliberalism is often associated with conservative administrations (for instance, I have credited the Conservative governments of the 1980s/1990s with popularising this ideology). For example, in an

appraisal of New Labour policy, Whitty (2002) argued that many of the policies it enacted represented a continuation of neoliberal ideas and, moreover, went further than the Conservative administration of that time. In addition, whilst making some distinctions, Bailey and Ball (2016:128) argued that there has been a 'continuing neoliberal emphasis on the minimal state and a belief in the sanctity, efficiency and effectiveness of the market', which both main political parties have subscribed to. This is exemplified by an observation made by Ed Balls (2016:106, who was an New Labour advisor and later a Cabinet Minister, who recounted that, in an interview he gave in which he claimed there were limits to the markets in the delivery of public services. He contended that a comment such as that should have been an 'innocuous statement for anyone in Labour to say', but that in the 'febrile times' of New Labour, it was considered a 'rebuff to the Blairites, and therefore (...) hugely controversial' (ibid).

### **Ideological concepts**

It is arguably the case that neoliberalism can be accounted for in the three ideological concepts of choice, competition and privatisation (Dunleavy et al., 2006; Ball, 2007; Le Grand, 1991). Together, they form an integrated, free market orientated set of ideas and policy tools. Le Grand (2006:13), for example, argued that '[a]lthough to some eyes, both within and outside the public sector, they appear to be unconnected, in fact they all form a coherent whole'. These ideas and policy tools have not only been embedded in the thought processes of policy makers here in the UK, but 'exported around the world' (Ball, 2013:1). Indeed, as Clarke (2012:298) argued the education system has experienced the 'full onslaught of neo-liberal political intervention in the form of marketisation, privatisation, standardisation and accountability measures'. This has, since the 1980s, resulted in successive governments in this country going through a process that has 're-thought' (Ball, 2007:18) public services (including education) and aligned them with the 'methods, culture and ethical system' (Ball, 2003:215) of the private sector:

[S]ince the 1970s education policy has been about 'radical change (an overused but significant term here about changing the principles on which education functions, for

example, the unsettling of the welfare state 'settlement of which comprehensive education was a part. (...) It is about rethinking, or 'reimagining', education and what it means to be educated (Ball, 2013:9).

Consequently, it is arguably the case that any analysis of public policy during the period of time this thesis is concerned with must consider how the policies these ideological concepts have given rise to have contributed the educational attainment of Black children. As a result, I want to briefly set out each of these ideas and offer some examples of the kinds of policies they have given rise to.

## **Choice**

From the perspective of neoliberalism, choice policies involve putting in place mechanisms that allow the citizen, or a third-party actor, to choose the organisation from which he or she wishes to receive a public service (Le Grand, 1991). The Coalition, for example, argued that '[e]very child should be able to attend an excellent local school of their choice' (HM Government, 2014:2). As a result, parents have not only been afforded the right to choose which school to send their child to but, increasingly, the type of school (e.g. local authority school or an Academy). Choice policies seek to mirror the arrangements in the free market, where consumers are free to choose the companies from which they wish to acquire goods and services.

Over the past thirty years, affording the public more choice has been the aspiration of successive governments (Gash et al., 2013; Bailey and Ball, 2016). These governments have proclaimed that the citizen is the principal beneficiary of such policies. The Coalition, for example, argued that '[c]hoice is about empowering people' (HM Government, 2014:1). It is arguably the case, however, that choice policies play a more significant role for those that seek to institute markets in the public sector. To them choice is, in effect, a market mechanism that fosters competition (Gash and Roos, 2012). Choice policies are enacted in order to ensure that the decisions citizens make about which providers to use force organisations to compete with each other for the right to provide those services (Le Grand,



1991). Choice, therefore, exerts what the New Labour government described as 'pressure' (Cabinet Office, 2006:3) on public service providers to meet the needs of service users (ibid), whilst the Coalition argued that choice is 'a crucial lever in improving the quality of public service delivery, incentivising providers to deliver the services that people want and choose for themselves and their families' (HM Government, 2014:1). Therefore, those organisations that respond to this pressure (i.e. the needs of the citizen) will flourish, whilst those that fail will face financial instability or insolvency, as the citizen will opt for an alternative provider (Le Grand, 1991). Such rewards and punishments are only possible because, amongst other things, the money each organisation receives is tied to the number of citizens that use its service (ibid). Le Grand (2006:14), for example, argued that certain conditions need to be in place if choice policies are to work:

First, the money must follow the choice. If being chosen has no favourable consequences and not being chosen has no unfavourable ones, then choice will not deliver the required incentives.

Providing more choice for parents has been a defining theme of the neoliberal policy agenda in education (Chubb and Moe, 1990; Chitty, 2004; Nambissan and Ball, 2010; Ball, 2012; Bailey and Ball, 2016). For example, the Coalition placed what Ball (2012:95) described as a 'greater emphasis on consumerism' as a part of its policy programme in education. Indeed, as I will illustrate in chapter 5, it was the political imperative to secure more choice for parents that motivated policy enactment in London.

## **Privatisation**

As I referred to earlier, it is arguably the case that the first principle of the 'neoliberal outlook' (Giddens, 2003:11) is its 'antipathy' (Whitty, 2008:165) towards the state (Friedman, 1951, 1955, 1962; Hayek, 2001; Giddens, 2003; Crouch, 2011; Bailey and Ball, 2016). It considers the state to be 'the source of all evils' (Giddens, 2003:13) that prevents enterprise and self-reliance. For scholars such as Friedman (1951, 1955, 1962) this suspicion is tied to the advocating of individual choice. Neoliberalism contends, for example, that state

monopolies (i.e. the state being the sole provider of public services) leads to inefficiencies (higher costs) and the prioritisation of employee self-interest over those of the service users (ibid). This rejection of the state does not, however, mean that neoliberalism advocates a weak state. Instead, it calls for less state intervention in certain policy areas and more in others. For example, unlike classic liberalism, which argues that the individual should be free from state intrusion, neoliberalism is in favour of the state establishing new markets with opportunities for private firms to make profit; creating the perfect conditions (such as laws, regulation and institutions) for markets to flourish; and cultivating enterprise and entrepreneurship amongst individuals (Olssen, 1996). This is what Gamble (1979:5) characterised as 'free economy—strong state' and Ball (2012:102) described as the state being both 'reluctant and assertive', which involves 'both shuffling off old responsibilities and defining and distributing new ones' (ibid). I will return to this issue at several points in this thesis, as recognition of what at first seem to be diametrically opposing conceptual ideas and policy objectives are, as Apple (2004:15) contended, vital to the neoliberal policy agenda as they 'cement conservative educational positions into our daily lives'. He stated the following:

The seemingly contradictory discourse of competition, markets, and choice on one hand and accountability, performance objectives, standards, national testing, and national curriculum on the other hand have created such a din that it is hard to hear anything else (ibid).

This may explain why, in education under the Conservatives and New Labour, the 'coordinating role of the state' increased (Ball, 2012:102) and, as Nick Clegg contended, the state is 'congenitally disposed to hoarding power' (Clegg, 2016:118).

Nevertheless, neoliberals argue that dismantling state monopolies will lead to improvements. In order to achieve this, privatisation (i.e. the shift in the relationship between the state and the private sector) is necessary (Kay and Thompson, 1986).

Privatisation has a long history and takes different forms. Ball (2007:13), for example, referred to 'privatisations' rather than privatisation:

The privatisation(s) referred to here are complex and multi-faceted and inter-related. They can be understood in relation to the development of a set of complex relationships between: (1) organisational changes in public sector institutions (recalibration); (2) new state forms and modalities (governance, networks and performance management); and (3) the privatisation of the state itself and the interests of capital (public services as a profit opportunity and 'effective' public service provision). (ibid).

I have distilled privatisation into three forms. First, it can be understood as the procurement of services by the public sector from the private sector, on behalf of its citizens, (Ball, 2007). Second, it can be the sale of public assets to the private sector (Kay and Thompson, 1986). Third, the enactment of 'purchaser/provider separation' (Dunleavy et al., 2006:470) policies in order to allow third party organisations to deliver public services (Kay and Thompson, 1986; Dunleavy et al., 2006; Ball, 2007).

As the Institute for Government argued, over the past thirty years there has been a 'dramatic shift' (Gash et al., 2013:4) in the delivery of public services in the UK. It argued that government is now rarely the sole provider of publicly funded services, which means that private, public and voluntary sector organisations compete for the right to provide public services, resulting in approximately £1 in every £3 that government spends on public services going to independent providers (Gash et al., 2013).

In education, privatisation, or what Ball (2012:94) described as 'exogenous privatisation', which refers to 'the entry of non-state and private providers' (ibid) into the education system, has been enacted in the form of management, provision and delivery of schooling (Walford, 2014). Walford (2014:326) argued that this has been undertaken to support the private sector 'financially and ideologically', whilst 'encouraging private investment in the state-maintained sector to replace government funding'.

Much of the Conservative government’s education reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, were ‘locked into classic neo-liberal, small state thinking’ (Ball, 2012:94) that is emblematic of privatisation. For example, City Technology Colleges<sup>14</sup> (CTCs) and Grant Maintained Schools<sup>15</sup>, which operated outside the supervision of Local Education Authorities<sup>16</sup> (LEA), were introduced (Chitty, 2004). These new providers competed for children (and therefore funding) alongside LEA maintained schools. This diversified the providers delivering education and set off the de-monopolisation of LEA led state education. Ball (2012:100), for example, wrote the following with regard to these policies, but also those of New Labour:

The neo-liberal Conservative and post-neo-liberal Labour governments have both been keen to break the public sector monopoly and get new actors into the provision of state schooling in response to a continuing ‘discourse of derision’ that constructs public sector schooling as dysfunctional.

It is arguably the case that the enactment of the Academies programme, which involved the establishment of ‘independent schools fully funded by the state’ (DfES, 2003:3), was the most salient example of privatisation in education to have had an impact on Black children. The Academies programme was introduced in 2000 and has grown significantly number since then (see Tables 1 and Table 2).

**Table 1: Number of academies, 2017**

Phase of education	Converter	Sponsored	Total
Primary (incl. middle deemed primary)	2,810	1,151	3,961
Secondary (incl. middle deemed secondary, all through and 16+)	1,503	643	2,146
Special	183	43	226
Alternative Provision	45	20	65
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,541</b>	<b>1,857</b>	<b>6,398</b>

Source: DfE (2017a)

**Table 2: Percentage of state-funded schools by type, 2017**

Type of establishment	Primary	Secondary	Total
Academies	23.6%	63%	30%
Free Schools (including studio schools and UTCs)	0.8%	7%	2%
LA Maintained	75.6%	30%	68%

**Source: DfE (2017a)**

At the time of writing, there were 6,398 Academies, of which 271 were located in London (DfE, 2017a). This was the insurgent model intended to advance the ‘post-comprehensive era’ (Barber, 2007:38) Tony Blair sought to create (Chitty, 2004; Adonis, 2012; Walford, 2014; Parliament. House of Commons, 2015). Initially, Academies were established as new schools that were modelled on CTCs, with sponsors that contributed £2 million towards the start-up costs (Adonis, 2012). However, the sponsorship arrangements later changed and the Coalition legislated in order to permit existing schools to convert into academies (DfE, 2010a; DfE, 2015).

This policy has given rise to the establishment of a range of Academy models, but all these schools share the same defining characteristics: they have a contract with the Secretary of State; they are funded directly by central government (rather than via local government) and; they are operated by private organisations (charitable trusts), which control the academy’s assets, such as the public land the school is located on (DfE, 2013; DfE, 2014a). The freedoms afforded to an Academy include the right to establish its own pay and conditions system for staff; freedom to choose whether to follow the National Curriculum (except for English, Science, Maths and Information Communications Technology since 2007); flexibility over the size and composition of its governing body and its governance arrangements; and freedoms to set the school day and the sessions taught (Cirin, 2014). Many of these freedoms are, somewhat paradoxically, now available to maintained schools.

Alongside Academies, the Coalition established the Free Schools programme<sup>17</sup>. At the time of writing there were 430 Free Schools, of which 274 (62 located in London) were secondary schools or primary and secondary schools combined (DfE, 2017b). They were introduced as 'non-profit-making, independent, state-funded schools' (DfE, 2015g.para.18) that had the same legal status as academies (Walford, 2014; Roberts, 2015), but could be established by third parties such as parents, teachers and other community groups.

It is arguably the case that the Academies programmes (i.e. academies and free schools) typify the 'free economy-strong state' (Gamble, 1979:5) neoliberalism is associated with. There is, for example, evidence that I will draw attention to later in this thesis which suggests that, whilst successive governments sought to extend free market principles in education (through the privatisation of schools, for example), they have also used the power and legitimacy of the state to intervene in the education market in order to raise standards (they have, for instance, retained significant influence over Academies). Ball (2006a:120), for example, wrote the following:

[U]nder both the Conservatives and Labour the use of the market, as a form of attrition, discipline and regulation, has not meant the abandonment of other traditional forms of state intervention. Indeed the creation of dispersed market conditions has been accompanied by greater centralisation of control over education and a distinct rise in the scope and number of interventions. There is in effect a dual process involved of decentralisation/centralisation.

Assessing the impact of these policies on the attainment of Black children is integral to addressing the research questions in this thesis.

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<sup>17</sup> Given that free schools have the same legal status as academies, I shall use the term academies to refer to both statuses of schools.

## Competition

Competition is what the Office of Fair Trading (2004:2) defined in its most general form as ‘a process of rivalry between firms to sell their products or services to customers – end users, other firms or, indeed, the public sector’. They argue that these organisations can compete in a market in terms of price, quality and innovation (ibid). From a neoliberal perspective, one may describe a market as follows:

[M]echanisms for the registering of preferences and apportioning of resources in society - and these can be contrasted with government planning procedures (including democratic planning procedures) for achieving the same end (Tooley, 1995:22).

It is arguably the case that one of the defining principles of neoliberalism is the belief in the supremacy of competitive markets (Friedman; 1951; Giddens, 2003 NAO, 2013). Privatisation, for example, cannot be realised (or the contracting out version at least) without the enactment of competitive markets. In the public sector, these markets take the form of what Le Grand (1991:126) referred to as ‘quasi-markets’. In a quasi-market, the state ceases to be the sole provider of one or more public services (i.e. it is no longer both the funder and the provider of services) and private sector organisations (privately owned providers) are invited to compete (alongside, or instead of, the public sector) to deliver services (ibid). Consequently, the state funds/purchases services from a variety of providers (all operating in competition with one another).

The neoliberal view is that competition will lead to economic efficiencies and better service delivery as providers will seek to cut costs (in order to be price competitive with their rivals and, therefore, maximise profits) and, in order to attract more service users and ensure their contract with government is renewed, improve services (Chubb and Moe, 1990; Le Grand, 1991 and Whitty, 1997; Whitty and Power, 2002; Ball, 2006a). As a result, it is arguably the case that the creation of quasi-markets has been ‘one of the great defining shifts in the way government has been run over the past 30 years’ (Gash and Roos, 2012:1) and represents a

‘major offensive against the bureaucratic structure of welfare provision’ (Le Grand, 1991: 1257).

The Education Reform Act 1988 was, in effect, the beginning of what Whitty (2008: 165) described as the ‘marketisation’ of the education system, as it created a quasi-market in the sector. Whitty (ibid) defined marketisation as ‘parental choice and school autonomy, together with a greater or lesser degree of public accountability and government regulation’. In 1992, marketisation, and the quasi-market in particular, was strengthened by the introduction of league tables by the Conservative government (Ball, 2006a). Today, league tables (or performance tables) are, according to the current Conservative administration, ‘at the heart of the accountability framework’ (DfE, 2017f), as they set out the performance of each school based on its Key Stage 2 (KS2) and KS4 results. They have become part of the neoliberal consensus on raising standards (Chubb and Moe, 1990; Apple, 2004; Ball, 2006a; Whitty, 2008; Simola et al., 2013; DfE, 2017f). Their introduction was intended to incentivise schools to improve, as the more children that met the bench mark, the higher each school was placed in its league table. Ball (2006a) argued that the publication of league tables under New Labour had ‘very powerful disciplinary and reorganising effects’, which focused schools’ attention on examination results. Securing a place in the upper echelons of the performance tables are important to (a) the reputation of each school and (b) its financial security, as the Education Reform Act introduced a new funding formula that was linked to the number of children on each school role. The theory underpinning league tables gives rise to the view that parents want to send their children to one of the best schools, so those schools highest in the league tables will be the most popular and, therefore, financially rewarded based on parental choice. Conversely, the schools lower in the league tables will either improve or close.

Policies such as league tables and those enacted as a result of the Education Reform Act 1988 created what Strain (1995:5) characterised as the ‘new dispensation’ in which schools have become managers of their affairs (as businesses are in a market of buyers and sellers), parents and children have become customers and schools are now potential rivals, selling services in a competitive market. This, according to Ball (2012:89), represents a return to the



'reluctant state' of the nineteenth century when it was 'strongly invested in the rules and spirit of the market economy' and 'hesitant and reluctant' (Ball, 2012:90) to become involved in direct responsibility for the provision of schooling, resulting in a 'patchy, messy and very diverse' (Ball, 2012:92) school system.

The work of Friedman (1951:91) is a good example of the origins of such ideas, given that he argued 'free competition could flourish and the price system operate effectively' in education. He contended that private enterprise (i.e. independent, for profit and not for profit organisations) are more efficient in meeting consumer demand than the state. According to Ball (2006a:122), such ideas are tied to the neoliberal effort to radically alter society:

The point about Thatcherite neo-liberalism lies not so much in Margaret Thatcher's denial of the existence of society as in her radical and bleak re-imagining of civil society. This rests upon a re-vivified competitive individualism and a new kind of consumer-citizen - the politics of temptation and self-interest - to which her denial alludes. The disciplines and effects of the market are rooted a social psychology of 'self-interest'.

### **Critiquing choice, privatisation and competition**

In sum, neoliberalism contends that 'the invisible hand of the market will inexorably lead to better schools' (Apple, 2004:18). There are, however, several problems with neoliberalism in general and the 'neo-liberal marketized solutions to educational problems' (Apple, 2004:15) (i.e. choice, privatisation and competition policies). For example, it is arguably the case that, whilst these ideological concepts have been presented as a set of policy tools capable of improving public services, they have in fact served as mechanisms for absolving the most powerful and wealthy in society of their social responsibilities, maximised the wealth and social advantages of these groups at the expense of others and entrenched social, political and economic inequality. This argument is pursued by scholars such as Schneider (2003:23), who argued that neo-liberal policies derives from 'an ideological attachment to free markets,

rather than a substantive analysis of how market forces play out in an unequal society [that] marginalize the vast problems created by inequality and poverty’.

In addition, Ranson (1993:334) argued that ‘while appearing to liberate consumers, the education market in fact entrenches most in a deeper and less accountable structure of control’.

With regard to the way in which I have presented these ideas, Paterson (2003:165), for example, may argue that to align the Conservative and New Labour governments to a single discourse would be unsatisfactory. Indeed, she argued that ‘[n]o governments or significant parties in a democracy have a unified ideology’ (ibid).

There are also five specific problems concerned with choice that I wish to draw attention to. First, as Olssen (1996:341) argued, ‘[c]onsumer demand cannot be seen as equivalent to social need’, which means that markets fail to prioritise or be concerned about inequality in resource allocation (an issue I will return to in chapters 5 and 7 when I discuss the unequal distribution of educational resources and the notion of Black children as assets).

Second, in relation to education policy, advocates pay insufficient attention to the way in which choice can give rise to racial and socio-economic segregation in schools (OECD, 2013; Kotok et al., 2017). Whilst this is not an issue I address in detail, as I will set out later in this thesis, the disproportionate number of Black children in Academies does appear to have had an impact on their education. For example, as Kulz (2014:699) stated that the Academy structures ‘seek to ‘liberate’ children from pathological raced, classed identities, but in ignoring the power of inequitable structures they simultaneously reify them’.

Third, economic disadvantage (such as poverty) can be an inhibitor to exercising choice. In education, for example, more affluent and savvy parents can negotiate the system in order to maximise their options (Olssen, 1996; Boyle, 2013). For example, as I will set out in chapter 5, there is data which suggests that parental choice played a role in the enactment of education policy by New Labour and the Coalition.

Fourth, returning to the notion of an internal economy of student worth that I drew attention to in the previous chapter, it may be the case that 'consumer choice gives rise to activism by producers and, consequently, leads to reduced choice. Ranson (1993: 336), for example, argued that, as is the case in other competitive markets, producers not only select consumers (which is perverse given that markets are intended to empower the consumer), but that 'producers and consumers search each other out in a progressive segmentation of the market'. What this means is that markets give rise to a 'hierarchy of distinction and public esteem' in which institutions such as schools 'differentiate themselves to fit specific niches' that effectively heightens the possibility of attracting students of high value and limits the opportunity of those that hold less worth to access such provision. This is relevant because producer activism is important in not only understanding how an internal economy of student worth exists in the education system, but also why it may have had an impact on the attainment of Black children.

Fifth, what successive governments have presented as choice is in fact preference or no choice at all. For example, in relation to school admissions, parents can only express a predilection for the schools that are willing to admit their child (based on each school's predetermined criteria, such as its catchment area). Furthermore, as I set out in the previous chapter, institutional racism is almost entirely inescapable for Black children, thus rendering choice a tool for the privileged alone. Gillborn (2005:89), for example, found that there were 'gasps of astonishment' from parents and activists 'after discovering the effects of exam tiering, combined with attainment grouping, on the attainment of Black children (Mac an Ghail, 1988; Gillborn, 1990; Strand, 2012). Furthermore, even if choice was an effective mechanism, it is unclear whether parents are given access to the right information to exercise it (OECD, 2013; Kotok et al., 2017).

Advocates of neoliberalism may, however, question whether there is indeed a real market in the education system given that (they would claim) it is highly regulated and lacks the necessary liberalisation on the supply side, such as opportunities to establish new provision, the lack of diversity in that provision (opportunities to offer home schooling or vocational

education, for example) as well as the providers in the market and the inequalities in funding (Tooley, 1995:26).

With regard to privatisation, in contracting out arrangements private organisations can and may fail to meet their contractual obligations (even before a service is provided). This leaves the state, which cannot simply withdraw in the same way a private provider can (due to statutory obligations) to seek alternative arrangements at what might be a higher cost (financially and politically) because of the circumstances in which it finds itself, as a result of the actions of the private organisation. Take, for example, the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2012 when G4S (a private company), which was contracted to recruit, train and supervise staff at a cost of £284m, announced two weeks before the start of the event that it could not meet its contractual obligations in full. This led to the army being deployed to fill the void. What is particularly pertinent about this incident was that the deployment of the army formed the basis of a contingency plan developed by the state in anticipation that the private contractor may fail (see, Parliament. House of Commons, 2012a). The issue in the education sector is most relevant in areas such as alternative education. For example, where Black children are excluded from third party provision, it is the state that must provide alternative educational provision. As I will seek to demonstrate later in this thesis, there is data to suggest that such arrangements have had a disproportionately negative impact on Black children.

There is also research which suggests that there is no relationship between the degree of competition that exists in an education system and the performance of students (OECD, 2013). In addition, and recognising the distinctions between conventional markets and quasi-markets offered by Le Grand (1991), the use of the prefix quasi suggests an inability to alter entirely the policies of public services in order to replicate those of private corporations. For example, the public sector has a duty to provide services to all eligible citizens (with some exceptions), whilst the private sector can more easily turn undesirable and less profitable customers away. In addition, the efficiencies achieved by a private sector organisation delivering public provision may assist the provider in maximising its profits, rather than realising savings for the Exchequer (Le Grand, 1991). There is also the danger

that competition will damage the public sector ethos (Dunleavy et al., 2006). There is, for example, evidence that I will set out in this thesis that suggests market mechanisms have resulted in morally questionable practices that have worked to the disadvantage of some Black children.

### **The discourse of standards**

Despite the criticisms of neoliberalism and the policy tools it has given rise to, it remains the case that there is a body of literature which suggests that it has, at one end of the spectrum, led to interventions by governments since the 1980s, which have involved the central state 'influencing what goes on in schools' (Hutchings et. al., 2012:9) and the education system more widely (Apple, 2004; Hutchings et. al., 2012). For example, as I referred to earlier, Apple (2004:15) argued that there is a dominant 'power bloc' that has sought to ensure its ideas are those that determine what goes on in schools:

This power bloc combines multiple fractions of capital who are committed to neo-liberal marketized solutions to educational problems, neo-conservative intellectuals who want a "return" to higher standards and a "common culture," authoritarian populist religious conservatives who are deeply worried about secularity and the preservation of their own traditions, and particular fractions of the professionally oriented new middle class who are committed to the ideology and techniques of accountability, measurement, and "management."

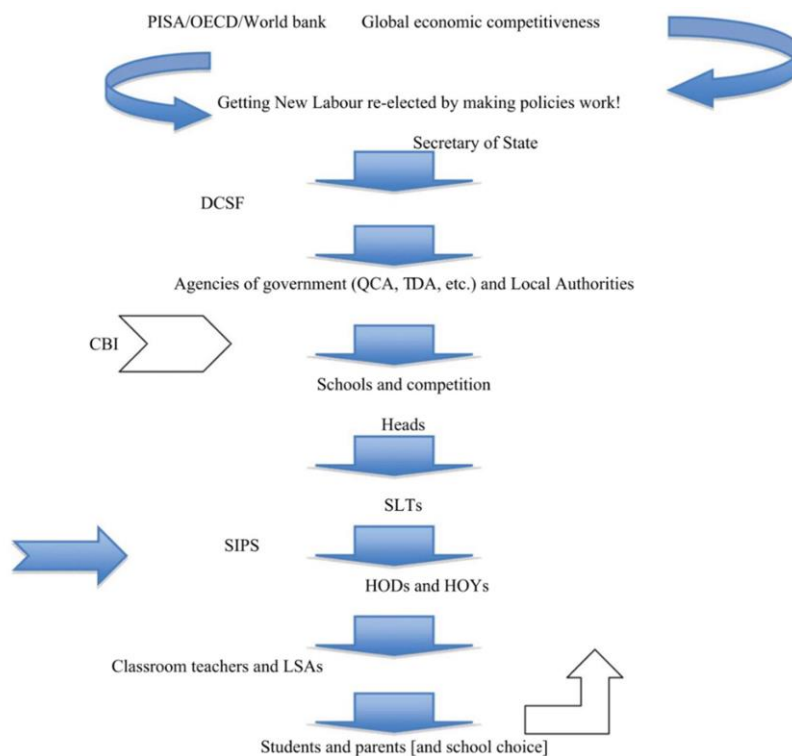
Apple (2004:15) went on and argued that, although there were 'tensions and conflicts', the aims of this alliance was to create the education system that is, they contended, necessary to increase international competitiveness and profit, as well as return to 'a romanticized past of the "ideal" home, family, and school'. In order to achieve this, the alliance has a set of objectives that include and are consistent with the neoliberal policy ideas of choice, privatisation and competition that I referred to above.

To secure these objectives, neoliberalism has manifested itself in the free economy-strong state approach (or possibly even policy dictatorship) I referred to earlier. This does not mean that 'a unitary decision maker or benevolent policy dictator' (Dryzek, 1993:216) has been created, but that neoliberalism has given rise to the formation of a hegemonic, centralising institutional structure (in the form of the state) that has sought to raise the standard of education (i.e. the performance of schools) in England by controlling all aspects of the 'delivery chain' (Barber, 2007:85) (see Figure 5). Ball et al. (2012, 2012a) associated this raising of standards with New Labour and what has been defined as 'deliverology' (Barber, 2007:3). Ball et al. (2012:2) described this as a 'science of delivery' and a 'method of ongoing transformation' of public services. According to its principle architect, Michael Barber, deliverology was Whitehall speak for the tools and techniques the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (a team operating from the Cabinet Office that focused on ensuring New Labour's politically salient targets were achieved) used to 'get the job done' (Barber, 2007:70).

In education, this has often been referred to as the 'standards agenda' (Ainscow et al., 2006: 295; Ball et al., 2012: 74; Duffield et al., 2000: 263), as it encompasses the approach successive governments have taken to educational reforms, which aims to 'drive up' standards of attainment, including workforce skill levels and ultimately national competitiveness in a globalized economy' (Ainscow et al., 2006: 295). However, given the way in which neoliberalism explicitly seeks to change the manner in which education should be thought of, a more appropriate concept may be 'the discourse of standards' (Ball, et al. 2012:74):

The discourse of 'standards' works to articulate a particular version and vision of what schooling is and should be – more, higher, better! Such a discourse exists at an abstract level in the politics of education but it has the ability to arrange and rearrange, form and re-form, position and identify whatsoever and whomsoever exists within its field'.

**Figure 5: Delivery chain**



**Source: Ball et al. (2012:515)**

I want to offer some context that may assist in explaining the notion of standards in education, as it has become a means by which the quality of education is denoted. From 1862, for example, the standard referred to the level the average child was expected to attain at the end of the academic year (Gillard, 2008. no pagination). Schools were funded using a ‘payment by results’ (ibid) system based on the expectation that children would progress one standard each year (ibid). According to Gillard (2008), this system caused anxiety, as each school attempted to get its children to Standard I as soon as possible after the age of six, in order to ensure it received its funding (ibid). Parallels can be drawn between the process of setting and attaining standards then and those used today. For instance, central governments have considered it their role to set standards. Margaret Thatcher, for example, argued that ‘government must take the primary responsibility for setting standards for the education of our children’ (Thatcher, 1987.para.44-51). It is arguably the case that New

Labour adopted a similar view. It sought to play the defining role in improving literacy and numeracy in primary schools and then secondary schools (Whitty, 2008). Subsequently, in England standards referred to the 'absolute or relative levels of attainment in national assessment or public examination results' (Sammons, 2008:652).

However, it is arguably the case that since the introduction of league tables, up to the time of writing at least, the most salient measurements of school standards happened at the end of KS2 and KS4. Prior to completing primary education, National Curriculum assessments are undertaken by children in Year 6 (the final year of KS2). Under the Coalition, for example, each year the government published the proportion of children nationally (as well as locally and in each school) that achieved the expected standard (i.e. level 4) in areas such as reading and mathematics (DfE, 2014). The government also publishes the performance of students and schools at the end of KS4. They are judged against the headline performance measure, which has changed over time.

As I referred to earlier, during most of the time this thesis is concerned with that measure was the proportion of children that achieve five good<sup>18</sup> GCSEs, including English and mathematics. This standard was highly political. Indeed, Garner (2015.para.1), writing for The Independent, claimed that school standards were so important to the New Labour Minister Stephen Byers that he changed his title to 'School Standards Minister'.

In sum, the headline measures have been, a combination of teacher judgments, standards and external examination results. They concern a relatively small proportion of the school population each year, at particular stages in their education. Yet, politically, they are a proxy for articulating the quality and effectiveness of each school, the education system and, consequently, the government of the day's stewardship of this policy area. Invariably, governments set targets against these standards and opposition parties use them as evidence to criticise government policy (whilst simultaneously proclaiming that if it were elected it would improve the very same standards and, therefore, the education system as a whole).

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<sup>18</sup> Whilst GCSEs are graded A\*-G, grades A\* to C have become the minimum measure of a good performance.



Each year, the media publish how well children have performed against these standards, whilst critiquing the performance of schools, the education system and the government (see, for example, Richardson and Sellgren, 2015). As I will set out later in this thesis, this headline performance measure is the principal mechanism for judging what it is to be an effective school.

The essence of the policies and practices encapsulated in this approach are captured in the extract below, from research carried out by Ball et al. (2012:4):

The ensembles of school policies that we have begun to map and examine in our case study schools are dominated by the drive to 'raise standards' - that is to drive up, by any means possible, the test and exam, performance of pupils and schools in relation to national benchmarks and the comparative performance of neighbouring and similar schools - specifically the number of students gaining five or more A-C grades in GCSE examinations.

As I will go on to argue in the next chapter, the saliency given to this headline performance measure has led to, and legitimised, further central government intervention in schools.

School standards reform is predicated on what Whitty (2008:170) referred to as the 'exemplary school discourse'. This refers to the belief that all schools can replicate the best schools and includes the setting of 'ambitious standards' (ibid). Whitty (2008:170) argued that an important part of this process is 'the principle of government intervention in inverse proportion to a school's success'.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have defined neoliberalism and pointed to some of the literature which suggests that it has developed into a powerful process of thought, aligned to an increasingly homogenous set of policy tools (such as choice, privatisation and competition) that successive governments have adopted and enacted in the education system. The literature

suggests that this has given rise to a neoliberal discourse of standards that has sought to secure a greater role over the management of the education system (including the re-imagination of what education should be) in order to improve the performance of schools. I contend, therefore, that examining the extent of this is critical to understanding the effect of education policy on Black children (an issue that I will explore in more detail in this thesis).

In the next chapter, I will set out the methodological framework for carrying out the fieldwork that will enable me to make such an assessment.

## **4. Methodology**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I will set out the methodological framework for carrying out my fieldwork. In doing so, and in order to provide context, I will first rehearse the central argument I set out in the literature review. I will then put forward my rationale for undertaking the fieldwork for this thesis, the key questions I explored in the primary research and how and why I use documents to supplement my primary research. I will then set out the advantages and limitations of these methods within the context of this study. Subsequently, I will briefly draw attention to the debate on valid and reliable research methods; the practicalities associated with the primary and secondary research I carried out (such as the number of candidates I interviewed and the kinds of documents I analysed); and I will explain my approach to data collection, collation and analysis. Finally, I will end this chapter by exploring the ethical framework within which the fieldwork was undertaken.

### **Purpose and rationale**

In the introduction, I argued that (a) the most significant policy advancements in race equality appear to have been enacted in response to the outrage, heightened protests and struggles of Black people following a major racist incident and that (b) the slow pace of change preceding and subsequent to events such as these constrained any improvements in the social, economic and political position of Black people. Subsequently, I considered the effect this may have had on the educational attainment of Black children. This led me to formulate the following research question:

What effect has government policy enacted in education between 1997 and 2017 had on the educational attainment of Black children in London secondary schools and how can this be explained?

## **Research questions**

In order to carry out this investigation, I developed three broad areas of questioning that I pursued whilst undertaking the fieldwork. The first concerned policy choices. In this area of questioning, I sought to gain a more detailed understanding of the decisions taken by successive governments on education policy (such as the choice to make London a priority in terms of education). The second focused on policy enactment. In this area of questioning, I attempted to gain a better understanding of the policies successive governments have introduced and the form they have taken. The third set of questions was concerned with the enactment of policies in schools. In this area, I sought to understand the role schools have played in the enactment of government policy and the impact this has had on Black children.

**Policy choices:** Why has London been prioritised for central government policy and investment in education?

**Government policy enactment:** What policies have successive governments enacted to improve the educational attainment of children in London?

**School policy enactment:** To what extent do senior leaders in schools play a role in improving the standard of education?

These three broad areas of questioning informed the entire research process. For example, it guided the reading I undertook during the literature review, the research questions I devised for the interviews (see Appendix G for the interview topic guide), the documents I collected for my secondary research and the themes I developed during the data analysis process.

In order to provide a framework to address the research question and ensure all relevant aspects were explored, I focused on the policies enacted by the previous three administrations: New Labour (1997-2010), the Coalition (2010-2015) and Conservative (2015-

2017). Therefore, where I refer to successive governments, I am specifically referring to these administrations (unless I state otherwise).

## **Methods of enquiry**

In order to undertake the fieldwork, I used semi-structured interviews and documentary research methods. The primary research comprised of 5 semi-structured interviews with Civil Servants<sup>19</sup> who either worked at the DfE or had previously done so and 15 Senior Leaders<sup>20</sup> who either work in a secondary school in London or have previously done so.

There are a number of practical, theoretical and ethical considerations to using these methods. However, it is important to emphasise from the outset that CRT takes a pragmatic approach that ensures no one methodology is privileged (Hylton, 2012). I adopted this principle. In this section, I will set out the strengths and limitations concerned with the practical elements of using these methods specifically in relation to the fieldwork I carried out for this thesis. I will also set out how I mitigated some of the limitations.

I carried out the majority of my fieldwork using semi-structured interviews with officials at the DfE and senior leaders in schools. I undertook the interviews over a period of four years.

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<sup>19</sup> Civil Servants are employed by the Civil Service, which is the bureaucratic organisation (i.e. the state) that supports the government of the day to develop and enact its policies and deliver public services. Civil servants are accountable to Ministers, who in turn are accountable to Parliament (Cabinet Office, 2015). The participants were all serving or had served as senior civil servants within the Department for Education. They had significant, and in some cases ultimate, responsibility for policy. As senior civil servants, their roles were commensurate with being a Director or Deputy Director. I have chosen not to disclose the ethnicity and specific titles of the post they each hold or held as this would make them identifiable.

<sup>20</sup> Senior Leaders is the term that was often used to describe the most senior teachers (including the Headteacher/Principal) in a school in terms of their management responsibilities. The teachers who undertook these roles had titles such as Headteacher/Principal, Deputy Headteacher/Deputy/Vice Principal and Assistant Headteacher/Assistant Principal (see Appendix F for the participants' actual titles and details about their gender, ethnicity and previous experience). In each school the Senior Leaders would form what was often described as the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), which was the most senior executive management structure in a school.

There are a number of strengths associated with this method that were directly beneficial to the fieldwork I undertook.

First, the method allows the researcher to get close to the data and to understand the definitions, concepts and meanings that participants attribute to social situations (Burgess, 1985). By undertaking a series of interviews, I was able to obtain a first-hand account from the participants about their perceptions and experiences in relation to the three broad areas of investigation I set out above and explore some of the means and motives that informed their actions and those of others.

Second, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to adjust, adapt and supplement his or her questions in order to acquire good quality data (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007). In addition, the researcher can probe participants and identify and follow new ideas or insights as they emerge (*ibid*). This freedom was invaluable to me, as I was able to adjust my line of questioning in key areas as I analysed my data and undertook more interviews. In addition, as I began analysing the data whilst undertaking new interviews, I also adjusted my lines of inquiry as codes and themes emerged and others were discontinued. The overall structure of questions remained the same, but the themes I probed evolved.

Third, undertaking research face-to-face with the participants afforded me the opportunity to clarify misunderstandings in my questioning and ask them to do the same with regard to their answers. This process was invaluable given that, for example, many of the participants often spoke about government policy in very general terms when I often sought to understand the difference between national policy and those enacted in London. In addition, some participants referred to working class children, for example, in a broader sense, whilst others were specifically referring to children eligible for FSM. Ensuring there was clarity in areas such as these (for both myself as the researcher and the participants) was essential.

Fourth, semi-structured interviews represented the most straightforward method to undertake given the nature of my research. I was able to supplement my existing knowledge and experience as a post graduate with reading, training and supervision in order to design

the right questions, undertake a pilot and conduct the interviews around my paid work commitments.

There are, of course, some practical limitations. I intend to set out those most relevant to this thesis and explain how I attempted to mitigate some of these limitations whilst undertaking the fieldwork.

First, securing suitable candidates to interview can be challenging. Given that I work in education, I found securing senior leaders to interview relatively straightforward (although the process of doing so is an issue I return to in the data collection section). However, I found it very difficult to identify and secure interviews with appropriately placed officials working at the DfE (those previously and currently in post). In addition, from the outset I was conscious that securing interviews with current or previous Ministers, advisors and senior officials would be challenging (if not almost impossible). To overcome limitations such as these, I used secondary data (I will explain my approach to this in more detail below).

Second, interviews can be time consuming for the researcher, which I found to be the case whilst carrying out my own research. Undertaking what were sometimes interviews of 90 minutes was challenging, given I carried out the fieldwork whilst employed full-time as a middle and then senior leader in a school. The most challenging aspect was organising to meet participants (sometimes at weekends or late in the evening).

Third, there is always the possibility participants may lie or seek to mislead the interviewer. For example, in a classic study by Hyman (1954), he found that White researches gained more socially acceptable responses from Black people and vice versa. One may deduce from this that some participants may choose to lie in order to present their actions, or those of the organisations they work for, more positively or negatively. In addition, I was mindful that participants may have attempted to control the impression they gave of themselves to me. This is what Erving Goffman (1990:203) described as 'impression management'. Therefore, given that this thesis is concerned with race and racism, I appreciated that I may receive

more socially acceptable responses depending on the ethnicity of the participant. In order to mitigate issues such as these, I designed the research questions in order to grant the participants a degree of flexibility in this area. What I mean by this is that, from the outset, I decided I would not ask any direct questions about race, but allow the issue to arise if the participant considered it to be an area for discussion. Only at this point would I develop a line of questioning appropriate to the points the participant raised. In addition, by undertaking a thematic approach to the data analysis I have, in almost all cases, focused on themes and patterns based on all the interviews rather than personal accounts about incidents that do not arise in the accounts of others, nor in the secondary data. Of course, I appreciate that these issues only mitigated the risk, rather than addressed them in their entirety.

Fourth, the accounts given by one or more participants may be inaccurate due to the passing of time (i.e. they forget). For example, I found that the participants were able to recall more recent incidents, decisions and actions with greater clarity than those that took place earlier in the time frame I am concerned with (such as those during Labour's first term in office). This was particularly the case in the interviews I undertook later in the process. In addition, I found that the accounts given by the participants were often limited because of the time they had served at the DfE or on any senior leadership team. In order to overcome these issues, I used supplementary questions (i.e. I invited participants to give examples from previous governments or to compare examples with similar incidents whilst New Labour was in power). In addition, I supplemented my primary data with secondary data gained from the documents produced by these administrations.

Fifth, securing high quality, valid data from semi-structured interviews is predicated on the skill of the interviewer. He or she must ask the right questions in the most appropriate form in order to garner information relevant to the research question. As I set out above, the training, supervision, reading and pilot I undertook assisted in this process, but I ultimately took an iterative approach in which my questioning was refined over the course of the research process (this was informed by the literature I read and the developments of themes that arose as I carried out the interviews).



In order to increase the volume and range of information available to me to address my research question, I used the documentary research method to collect further data in relation to the policies enacted by successive governments and their motives for doing so. This method, which is also known as 'documentary investigation' (Scott, 1990:1) and 'document analysis' (Bowen, 2009:27), involves the collection of data from documents, such as government documents and newspaper articles. The data is then examined and interpreted, with a view to 'elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge' (Corbin and Strauss, 2008:1). In the majority of cases, although not all, this method has been used by researchers to complement other methods (Bowen, 2009). For example, it is often used in combination with other qualitative research methods (ibid). I chose to replicate this approach. There are several strengths associated with documentary research, which I want to set out in relation to why I chose this particular method.

First, it enabled me to collect and analyse a broader range of data. There is a strong tradition in the social sciences that researchers consider the full range of sources available to him or her to collect data (Scott, 1990). Second, in contrast to the availability of politicians and officials, documents (particularly those which are made public) are ubiquitous and readily available (McCulloch, 2004). Therefore, selecting this method mitigated the problem of securing suitable participants to interview. Third, documents of the nature I am concerned with (such as White Papers and speeches) are fixed and, therefore, offered me an opportunity to analyse and interpret intentions, motivations, policies and actions as they were at the time, rather than how they are remembered through recollections (this is in contrast to interviews, which is a limitation of this method that I highlighted above). Fourth, documents can assist in verifying findings or corroborating information from other sources (Bowen, 2009). This was particularly important in my research, given that snowballing can lead to a skewed and unrepresentative sample.

There are, of course, several weaknesses associated with this method. Prior to setting these out, I want to briefly address some of the misconceptions and credibility issues associated with documentary research. These issues may well be considered limitations in their own

right, but I want to argue that such criticisms should be rejected. As a research method, semi-structured interviewing sits comfortably alongside other approaches in the social sciences. Its relationship to the social sciences is much more clear-cut. Documentary research, however, is not so straightforward. Indeed, it is given less prominence in the social sciences (Platt, 1981; Prior, 2003; Mcculloch, 2004). Discussions of its various uses in methodological literature, for example, are 'sparse and patchy' (Platt, 1981:31). Moreover, references to documentary research are often combined with other points with regard to methods and data and, as a result, they merely focus on what types of documents exist and their associated problems (ibid). It is for this reason that I anticipate some will critique my use of this method. They may, for example, question the appropriateness of documentary research in an investigation such as this because I am principally using primary data. Yet, such dissatisfaction ignores the strong tradition of using documents in research of a sociological nature. Indeed, a substantial amount of historical and comparative sociological work has involved the use of documentary materials, as has much work on contemporary societies, policy research and policy sociology (Scott, 1990). Karl Marx, for example, used reports produced by factory inspectors in his work; Max Weber drew on religious tracts and pamphlets in at least one of his famous studies; and Durkheim made use of official statistics in his seminal piece on suicide (Scott, 1990). In addition, more recently Thomas and Znaniecki (1996) carried out documentary research in their piece 'The Polish Peasant in Europe and America'. References have also been made in articles and reports by scholars who have used documentary research as an element of their methodology (Bowen, 2009). Indeed, those that argue that qualitative sociology has relied heavily on semi-structured interviews at the expense of other qualitative methods (Delamont, 2012) may welcome research which draws on a broader range of methodologies.

However, one must rightly give consideration to why certain documents have been selected and others discounted. In addition, there are several limitations that I want to draw attention to.

First, the documents I was concerned with (such as policy documents and speeches) are relatively fixed. Therefore, unlike semi-structured interviews, for example, I could not probe

for new ideas or insights as I did in the interviews. However, as I undertook the primary and secondary research simultaneously, I was able to ask the participants about information that appeared in documents. This was particularly advantageous when interviewing the officials working at the DfE.

Second, the method is subject to 'low retrievability' (Bowen, 2009:32), which means that accessing some documents may be difficult. For example, in carrying out my research I found it much more challenging to retrieve documents (particularly speeches) in relation to New Labour's three terms in office than those of the Coalition and Conservative governments. Documents from these administrations were readily available via government websites (although I had no means of verifying whether their database represented a comprehensive compilation). In terms of the types documents I analysed, see Appendix B).

Third, documents are usually produced for specific audiences, with the intention of conveying a particular message. The researcher must avoid misinterpreting or making assumptions about a script. For example, I was very aware that some of the speeches I analysed were intended for stakeholders (such as teachers or the public). Under such circumstances, the relevant Minister may have spoken with a clear intention of seeking to bring those stakeholders onside and, therefore, may have sought to measure their language to avoid antagonising a particular group or omitted technical or political aspects. Were they to be interviewed, for example, they may have spoken with a greater degree of clarity or specificity about a policy, decision etc. The thematic approach assisted in overcoming this problem, as I was able to undertake a broader analysis of the issues deriving from more than one particular document. I could, for example, draw inferences from a series of speeches made by a particular Minister, as opposed to arriving at a conclusion from a single document. In addition, by utilising the full range of primary and secondary data available to me, I was able to corroborate claims.

## Epistemology and research findings

In this section, I want to discuss the consistency, credibility and applicability of social research methods. However, prior to doing so, it is important to state that I share some of the arguments made by CRT scholars and others with regard to the nature of knowledge and how it is substantiated. For example, CRT provides a structure that 'explicitly recognises and encourages people of colour to name, speak and theorise about their experiences as shaped by racism' (Rollock, 2012:67). In addition, CRT scholars are sceptical about the ability of research to be truly neutral, apolitical and reflective and, therefore, able to capture the operations of racism in society. Indeed, CRT has been critical of 'mainstream methodologies', as they are culpable in 'reinforcing oppressions whilst subordinating the voices and values of those rendered invisible through conventional modes of thinking' (Hylton, 2012:26). For example, Hylton (ibid) wrote the following:

CRT embraces critical research, though it is wary of their complacency and colour-blindness in that regard. Those researchers that advocate neutrality and objectivity, aligned to conventional views of validity and reliability may not agree that they could be reinforcing racialised inequalities by tolerating only certain forms of knowledge.

Therefore, notions of credibility and applicability must be considered within the context that truth is relative and subject to the oppressive will of others (Hylton, 2012). This is evident in, for example, the way in which colour-blindness and pathological approaches to underachievement are dominant in considerations of race, which assist in subordinating dissenting views. Therefore, CRT gives consideration and credibility to the lived experiences of Black and minority ethnic groups. Tyson (2003:20), for example, wrote the following:

It is the understanding of lived oppression – the struggle to make a way out of no way – which propels us to problematise dominant ideologies in which knowledge is constructed.

Notwithstanding this, I consider myself to be a 'methodological pragmatist' (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973:7) rather than an ideologue. Indeed, as I set out earlier, the 'pragmatic politics' of CRT ensures that no one methodology is privileged (Hylton, 2012:27). Yet, it is still important to draw attention to the existence of a theoretical and methodological debate on the consistency, credibility and applicability of social research methods and the results they give rise to (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). This is particularly important given that interviewing raises interesting questions concerning the consistency of my own study (Marshall and Rossman, 1995).

In this context, consistency refers to 'the extent to which a measurement procedure yields the same answer however and whenever it is carried out' (Kirk and Miller, 1986: 19; Marshall and Rossman, 1995). Therefore, given the scale of the fieldwork I wish to undertake, it is legitimate to question the extent to which this study is reliable and to what extent I can legitimately generalise its findings. Traditional Positivists would go further and argue that the qualitative nature of my research method means that the evidence I gathered is subjective and, therefore, cannot be subjected to scientific interrogation through, for example, an exact repetition of the study which would heighten the consistency of my findings (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). However, it is important to draw attention to the fact that the purpose of qualitative research is not to generalise the findings; instead it is intended to understand phenomena within the social context it exists. Indeed, as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:233) rightly argued, qualitative researchers are 'suspicious of rapid moves from statements about particular situations to broader claims', despite seeking to make some general conclusions (ibid). Connolly (1998:125) put forward the following analogy:

It should be clear that attempts to judge the relevance of ethnography by its ability to generalise are tantamount to encouraging ethnographic researchers to dance to the wrong tune.

Of course, it is arguably the case that no one qualitative study stands out by itself as being reliable given that, at best, it represents a relatively small (representative or otherwise) systematic piece of investigation into a social phenomenon (such as institutional racism in a selection of schools). However, one may argue that if a large quantity of research about a particular social phenomenon has been produced over an extended period of time and arrives at the same conclusions, one can begin to legitimately make generalisations.

Interpretivists would question whether quantitative methods truly provide the objectivity some of its advocates claim. In the end, it is questionable whether any research can be completely objective (either quantitative or qualitative). Indeed, both paradigms fail to recognise the pivotal role of the researcher who is a part of the social world they study (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). A straight forward example of this would be the numerical recording of the incidents of racism in a school playground. Such an exercise is likely to be equally as subjective as a qualitative piece of research that involves the researcher interviewing pupils about their experiences of racism in such an environment. Neither method is free of the values nor interpretations of the researcher, as they both rely on, for example, the researcher determining what does and does not constitute a racist incident.

In order to mitigate issues such as these, qualitative researchers undertake a range of practices. For example, the researcher will set out how he or she has operationalised their concepts (defined them within the context of the research). In addition, the researcher will draw the reader's attention to the processes they have gone through to reflect their role in the research, the potential biases their role gives rise to and, where possible, the actions they have taken. These are processes I have subjected myself to in order to address these issues in my own research (reflectivity is a practice I have set out separately below).

In this context, credibility refers to the extent to which results from any given piece of research are a true reflection of what is being studied (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). In this regard, there are three potential errors which may occur that would give rise to one questioning the credibility of a study: (type one) the researcher considering a principle,

relationship, correlation etc. to be true when it is not; (type two) to reject a principle, relationship, correlation etc. when it is true; and (type three) asking the wrong question (Kirk and Miller, 1986). As a result, given that the central assumption of qualitative research is that in order to understand a person's actions and why they have taken those actions, one must understand the meanings involved (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), qualitative methods are viewed by Interpretivists to be more effective than quantitative methods in achieving this level of understanding. Therefore, interpretivists consider qualitative research to have a higher degree of credibility (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). Furthermore, adopting this approach is to recognise that, as the researcher, one is interpreting data in a particular way (drawing on theory whilst doing so), but understanding that others may have different interpretations of the same data.

Therefore, the techniques and tools at my disposal in an interview allowed me to undertake a more in-depth investigation into the principles, relationships and correlations before accepting or rejecting them, which would suggest the findings are likely to be more valid (or at least convincing). For instance, when a teacher stated that parents and community organisations are fully involved in developing improvement strategies, before satisfying myself that this was a true reflection of practice in that school, I interrogated this further by asking a range of supplementary questions (such as how does this happen?). I then invited the interviewee to provide additional information (such as recent examples) and I sought the views of other relevant participants in order to verify and cross-reference this statement.

### **The role of the researcher**

One can conclude from the debate concerning the consistency, credibility and applicability of social scientific research that it has a direct impact on the way in which research is conducted. In this section, I want to focus in more detail on the notion of credibility in relation to my role as the researcher because I have arrived at the view that, within the social sciences at least, the notion of objective research is ambiguous (or at least tenebrous). What is more, having now undertaken my own research, I am inclined to believe that objectivity in its purest form does not exist, either in understanding social phenomena or the research

methods used to study them. Indeed, as Blair (1998:13) argued, 'no matter what our good intentions, we cannot guarantee neutrality' in our interpretations or our analysis. This is primarily because the researcher's role is pivotal (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). They play a central role in the research process. Recognition of this role is often referred to as reflexivity, which Delamont (1992:8) described as being 'a social scientific variety of self-consciousness', whilst Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford (1997:237) referred to it as 'the process by which the observations that we make are dependent upon our prior understandings of the subject of our observations'.

This is illustrated by understanding that my own characteristics and experiences as a Black man, a former recipient of state education, a qualified teacher and senior leader, a former school governor, a former local authority official and a post graduate undertaking research have influenced my values and politics on the very issues which are central to this thesis. For example, it is clear that, on reflection, my own proximity (both emotionally and physically) to the events surrounding the murder of Stephen Lawrence are likely to have, subliminally at least, driven the emphasis I have placed on institutional racism in explaining the position of Black children in the education system. For instance, at the time of his death Stephen Lawrence was a similar age to me; I have friends and family who knew, or had known of him; as a teenager I spent countless amounts of time in Eltham with my friends (principally between 1991/2 and 1993); and in the infamous hidden camera footage David Norris, who was one of the people who murdered Stephen Lawrence, can clearly be heard stating his hatred for Black people and his desire to come to Catford, South London (where myself, my immediate family and my friends lived at that time) and murder Black and Asian people. It is possibly highly emotive to say so now, but at the time myself, my friends and members of my family were very aware that, whilst Stephen Lawrence was the one to tragically lose his life, it could have been anyone of us. More recently, as a senior leader working in a secondary school in London I am acutely aware of the racial disparities in the education system (particularly in relation to the underachievement of Black children and the disproportionate number of Black boys excluded from school). I cannot, therefore, claim to be neutral, as I start from the strong belief, through the academic work I have read but also my lived experiences in London, that we live in an institutionally racist society.



Consequently, it was important that I was systematic in the way in which I collected and analysed the primary and secondary data (a process I will describe later in this chapter). For example, I used existing academic research in order to check, substantiate and challenge my findings and, as I highlighted earlier, I was able to structure my questions in order to ensure issues of race and racism were only raised by me if the participants did so first. I hope that one of the advantages of this was that the participants did not feel compelled to discuss race and, therefore, institutional racism unless they determined it to be important.

I am also aware that my ethnicity can affect the participants. There are scholars who have written about the way in which race can influence the behaviour of participants. Maylor (2010:53) is one of many scholars who has documented some of the negative experiences she faced as a Black researcher conducting interviews of senior leaders in schools. Indeed, she wrote the following:

Before engaging in particular research projects I do not think that we can ever fully comprehend the difficulties we might encounter during the course of our research or the possible impact on our identity as Black female researchers. The disclosure of personal research experiences is salient given the impact of such experiences on researchers as individuals, their engagement with research participants and on the data collection process.

It is worth pointing out that, whilst Maylor (ibid) referred to her gender in this particular extract, she argued that her experiences as a researcher were principally shaped by her ethnicity.

As a consequence of issues such as these, and given that interviewing is based on 'the intense nature of the relationships established between researcher and the researched' (Burgess, 1985a:79), I understand that my ethnicity and experiences may have had a direct impact on the participants and, therefore, on the quality of the data I generated from the fieldwork. For example, Troyna (1998:97) argued that 'cross-racial' interviewing is predicated on the view that race can affect the validity of data:

[S]ome respondent accounts are more authentic and, as a corollary, intrinsically superior, than others and that these more 'genuine' and 'accurate' accounts are more likely to be elicited if there is symmetry between the ethnicity of the interviewer and respondent.

In addition, Phoenix (1994) noted that Black interviewees are more forthcoming in their views when interviewed by a Black rather than a White researcher. One may conclude that the reverse may have also posed a risk to my research. For example, the overwhelming majority of the participants I interviewed were White, which is reflective (although not accurately) of the make-up of senior leadership teams in schools and the Civil Service. For example, at the time of writing this thesis the DfE (2016) reported that only 3.2% of Headteachers are from Black and minority ethnic groups, compared to 7.3% of all teachers). In addition, whilst Johnson and Campbell-Stephens (2010) argued that there are no official figures on the number of Black people in senior leadership roles in London schools, they noted that there are reports that estimate 4-6% of Headteachers in London are from Black or other ethnic minority backgrounds. In addition, McNamara et al. (2009) reported that only 1.7% of teachers are Black or Black British, which may suggest that very few Black people operate at a senior level. With regard to the Civil Service, 90% are not from an ethnic minority background (Cabinet Office, 2015).

In addition to this, I was very aware of the discrimination Black professionals experience in the education system, which could hinder my ability to build a rapport with participants and, therefore, affect my ability to elicit the genuine and authentic views of the candidates. What I mean by this is that Black professionals working in the education system are exposed to racial discrimination (such as low expectations) as Black children are too (Haque and Elliot, 2017). I was very aware that this may affect the willingness of the participants to take my research seriously and/or my position as a researcher.

I could do very little to mitigate these issues. I could not, for example, ensure White participants were interviewed by a White researcher. However, as I highlighted earlier, I

was able to structure my questions in order to ensure issues of race and racism were only raised by me if the participants raised them as issues first. One of the advantages of doing so (although this was not the principal reason for adopting this technique) was that I was able to avoid the perception of being the aggressive, angry or oppositional professional that Black people can be stereotyped as (Haque and Elliot, 2017).

Given the issues I have drawn attention to in this section, in carrying out my research I chose to place the notions of achievement and underachievement at the centre of the discussions throughout the interviews. I then allowed the participants to draw on their experiences and examples as they considered appropriate. In doing so, it was my intention that the participants would be less inhibited by my self-determined focus on race inequality. As a consequence, I hoped to improve the quality of the data. For example, as I have referred to earlier I wanted issues of race and inequality to emerge only if the participants deemed these issues to be important, rather than being steered to do so by me as the researcher. Therefore, if race and inequality were raised, it would go some way to demonstrate the saliency of these issues (or otherwise), rather than it being so simply because it is the focus of my study. In addition, whilst I chose to remain inquisitorial, by allowing the participants a degree of freedom to shape the course of the interview (within the broad areas of questioning I have set out), I hoped to be less imposing than if I were to, for example, address issues of race directly. However, as with previous measures I have outlined, I recognise that these issues remain problematic when carrying out research, analysing data and arriving at conclusions. It is clear, therefore, that the researcher's presence can have an impact on the participant. Of course, the presence of the researcher does not affect documentary research in the same way, as the material is fixed (Bowen, 2009).

I also understand that my past experiences may have had a positive impact on my ability to build a rapport with the participants, given that I may have been considered a colleague (or at least an insider) as well as a researcher (Delamont, 1992). The participants may have been more forthcoming in their answers, for example. In addition, given that I knew a small number of the participants (particularly the senior leaders) or they were referred to me by

someone I know, this may have ensured they were more forthcoming in their responses. It is, of course, entirely possible that my relationship to them had the opposite effect as they may, for example, presume I would be privy to information about their school or their practices that they would otherwise be reluctant to make known for fear of them being shared amongst colleagues they and I were familiar with. My strict adherence to ethical standards (which I will refer to later in this chapter) prohibited such practice, but one cannot be entirely sure this had the desired effect on a participant's willingness to discuss issues freely.

Clearly, there was an important balance to be struck here in order to recognise the role I played as the researcher and the need to ensure that the fieldwork and overall thesis was not limited by my own life story. Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford (1997), for example, argued that the researcher must reflect on the degree to which he or she can, or indeed should, offer more than a partial account of what is being studied, given that he or she is grounded in their own past experiences (i.e. their limited perceptions, prior knowledge and their values).

Ultimately, the success of my research will be judged on, amongst other things, my ability to ensure that a process of reflexivity was embedded into every aspect of this study:

As long as qualitative researchers are reflective, making all their processes explicit, then issues of reliability and validity are served (Delamont, 1992: 9).

There is a further point that I took into consideration when conducting the fieldwork that it is worth briefly drawing attention to. There is the danger that the researcher can end up 'going native' (Delamont, 1992:34), which involves the interviewer sympathising with the views of the interviewee to the point at which the interviewer inadvertently adopts the views of the participant or loses perspective. Given that I work as a senior leader in a secondary school, I was very conscious of avoiding sympathising with, or indeed favouring, the work senior leaders undertake. As a result, I spent a great deal of time ensuring that I had sufficient data to justify the themes I developed and the subsequent arguments I made.

## **Data collection**

My starting point for collecting data was to recognise and accept that it is 'inescapably a selective process' (Miles and Huberman, 1994:55), which means that one cannot collect all the data relevant to the research question (ibid). Therefore, determining what data to collect, and how, was an important part of the process.

The primary research comprised of five semi-structured interviews (lasting approximately ninety minutes each) with Civil Servants and fifteen semi-structured interviews (lasting approximately seventy minutes) with Senior Leaders (see Appendix D). I selected my sample using what is often described as snowball or chain sampling (Miles and Huberman, 1994). I used my existing contacts (such as colleagues I have worked with in a professional capacity in schools and local government) in order to identify suitable and willing participants. I selected the participants based on their availability and experience. For example, I specifically sought participants who had some involvement with education policy whilst working for the DfE and those who were serving or former senior leaders who had been involved in leading some aspect of KS4. Whilst I recognise that all school staff are involved in raising attainment, given the nature of this thesis, I was particularly keen to understand the views and experiences of senior leaders operating in this aspect of education.

Snowball sampling offers several advantages. For example, it opens up a network of contacts (Arber, 1997). I found this to be the case, particularly with regard to accessing Civil Servants, as one participant was able to refer me to others working in similar areas. In addition, this form of sampling is useful because it affords the researcher credibility which may otherwise not be granted (ibid). I was able to, for instance, interview two Civil Servants, who I had previously approached independently but declined my offer, due to recommendations they had received from another participant. Snowball sampling also presents a number of limitations. For example, whilst it offers access to what may be a closed or reluctant network of potential participants, it can limit the representativeness of the sample (Arber, 1997). In addition, snowball sampling relies on relationships and

networks that can be unreliable and fragile. For example, I discovered that participants made recommendations that did not come to fruition or committed to seeking out participants and then failed to do so. This made the process time consuming and on occasions frustrating.

The interviews were structured around the three broad areas of questioning I set out at the beginning of this chapter. The questions were, however, adapted to reflect the level of responsibility each participant had, in order to make the interviews as relevant as possible and to avoid the participants being diverted away from their personal experiences and recollections. I designed the questions with the explicit intention that they focus on education policy at a national and school level, rather than policy specifically targeted at Black children, as this thesis is concerned with the educational achievement of Black children within the context of education policy aimed at improving the attainment of all children. Indeed, it is important to reiterate here (as I set out in the introduction) that this thesis is not simply concerned with the specific policies targeted at raising the achievement of Black children. Its focus is the educational achievement of Black children within the context of neoliberalism.

I chose to collect primary data from officials at the DfE because I considered it important to obtain a first-hand account of the ways in which central governments enact policies to improve the standard of education and the motivations underpinning those decisions. I chose to interview senior leaders because I considered it imperative to understand how national and regional policies manifest themselves in schools. For example, senior leaders hold a unique position as recipients of government policy, but they are also policy makers in schools. They are charged with enacting government policy, but they also play a role in accepting, rejecting and/or reshaping it at a school level (Ball, 2006). Indeed, there is a propensity to focus on policy development and enactment at a national level at the expense of the activity that takes place in schools (Ball, 2006; John, 1998). For example, Ball (2006:26) argues that 'the prevailing, but normally implicit view' of policy is that it is sequential, when in fact it is more complex:

Policies pose problems to their subjects, problems that must be solved in context. Solutions to the problems posed by policy texts will be localised and should be expected to display ad hocery and messiness. Responses indeed must be 'creative'. Policies do not normally tell you what to do, they create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed or particular goals or outcomes are set. A response must be put together, constructed in context, off-set against or balanced by other expectations (Ball, 2006:21).

As I set out earlier, I chose to undertake documentary research in order to supplement the data I collected from the interviews (I sought to broaden the range of information available to me about central governments and their actions). Determining what documents should be considered and what to discount can have a significant impact on the data analysis process and, subsequently, the researcher's findings. Therefore, when carrying out documentary research defining what is meant by a document within the context of the research is important. There is a debate within the social sciences with regard to defining what a document is (see, for example, Prior, 2003) and what form they take (see, for example, McCulloch, 2004). A document is an 'artefact' (Scott, 1990:5) that is constructed by humans in socially organised circumstances (ibid). Its 'central feature inscribed in text' (Scott, 1990:5). The text can be thought of as a script, which is the manifestation of the spoken word (ibid).

As I set out at the beginning of this section, data collection is a selective process. Given the abundance of information produced by and on governments, I decided to limit the range of material I would consider based on the criteria proposed by John Scott (1990), who argued that four points must be considered when handling documents for research purposes:

- Authenticity: is the evidence genuine and of unquestionable origin?
- Credibility: is the evidence free from error and distortion?
- Representativeness: is the evidence typical of its kind, and, if not, is the extent of its untypicality known?
- Meaning: is the evidence clear and comprehensible?

It is for this reason selecting the documents was an important part of the fieldwork. Set out in table 4 is a list of the types of documents I determined, based on the criteria proposed by Scott (1990), to collect and analyse. The overwhelming majority of the data is drawn from documents produced by central governments and government agencies (such as Ofsted).

Almost all the material I used derived from searching for specific documents (such as the manifestos of political parties and education White Papers) online. I did so using search engines, such as google and the [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) website. I searched for documents using key words (see some examples in Appendix C).

With regard to data produced by organisations other than governments, the overwhelming majority of the documents are newspaper articles from widely available publications (I retrieved all of the articles from the Internet). The majority of these articles were from within education publications (such as Schools Week and TES) or national publications (such as the Guardian, BBC, Telegraph and Independent). In this area, I used the search examples set out in table 4 (particularly searching for key individuals involved in education). I chose, however, to exclude quotes and statements made by general teaching unions, such as the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT), as they by and large represent the interests of teachers other than senior leaders (although not exclusively). I do, however, use quotes from newspapers and articles produced by the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT).

I collected this data whilst I undertook the interviews. I started with a number of what I considered to be key documents. These consisted of policy documents and academic evaluations of programmes aimed at specifically raising the attainment of Black children; policy documents concerned with reforming the school system and improving results at KS4 and policy documents and evaluations concerned with London Challenge (see Appendix B).

As a result of references made in these documents (in the main text and in the bibliography), I was led to other publications, which I then searched for via the Internet. I also took recommendations from participants and others. I recognise that the process was no more



systematic than the snowball sampling I used to create a sample for my primary data collection. Therefore, some of the criticisms associated with this method are also applicable here. In particular, it is possible that relevant material may have been overlooked.

### **Data analysis**

It is arguably the case that qualitative research is much harder to undertake than, for example, quantitative work (Delamont, 1992). Therefore, prior to adopting an approach to data analysis, I began to take notes and summarise the primary and secondary data I had collected in order to begin to make sense of it. Indeed, I adopted an approach consistent with the view put forward by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), who argued that data analysis is not a distinct stage of the research process, but an integrated phase of the whole fieldwork phase (including the preparation phase).

Following some research and training, I decided to analyse the data using a thematic approach (*ibid*). However, the codes and themes developed and changed throughout the research and analysis process until I arrived at a settled set during the writing up phase (see Table 3 for the final set of codes and themes). As I transcribed the interviews and analysed a series of documents, I coded the text using the pre-existing codes I developed based on the initial work I carried out whilst developing my research question and writing the literature review (many of these codes relate to specific policies or concepts, such as achievement and underachievement). As I collected more data, I began to re-code, as well as rename codes, in order to ensure consistency and reduce duplication.

With regard to the documentary research, I analysed the material using the same codes and themes as the primary research. In doing so, I also made use of a system called 'marginal remark' (Miles and Huberman, 1994:67), which involves documenting interpretations of the data as it is analysed. I did so because I was particularly keen to draw out the various ways in which data within documents related to aspects of my primary data. I appreciate, however, that to some advocates of documentary research (see, for example, McCulloch, 2004) such a narrow focus is somewhat limiting and fails to bring to life this methodological

approach. Notwithstanding this, I considered it to be incumbent upon me to ensure my analysis represented as 'systematic and disciplined search for knowledge' (Scott, 1990:1) as was possible within the context of doctoral research. Therefore, I limited the scope of my analysis in order to ensure it met this standard.

The themes (see Table 3) emerged through a review of the dominant codes (i.e. those that consistently appeared in the interviews and documents). I used Nvivo (which I refer to in more detail below) to search for the most dominant words used in the text of each of the codes. I also took notes on the main messages and issues that arose from the data. Much of what emerged was concerned with specific policies, types of policies and the kind of outcomes policies were expected to achieve (at a national level and in schools).

I began with eight themes concerned with (1) the prioritisation of London, (2) White children and education policy (3) Black children and education policy, (4) school accountability and targets (5) in school education policy and raising standards (6) out of school education policy and raising standards (7) local government and academies and (8) school data and deliverology. However, I discarded or amalgamated them with others (in the main this was due to the small amount of data garnered from the text or they failed to sufficiently address the research question) until I arrived at three distinctive themes. I now want to explain the themes in more detail.

Theme one: the prioritisation of public problems. This theme draws attention to the choices available to governments and schools to maintain, ignore, prioritise or de-prioritise educational underachievement as a public policy problem; the decisions they make when enacting policies aimed at addressing educational inequalities; and the possible impact their policies have on the educational attainment of Black children.

Theme two: school accountability. This theme draws attention to school accountability (including the increased use of data and the privileged position it holds) and the government interventions that sustain it. It examines the effect (positive and negative) this had on the attainment of Black children in London.

Theme three: policy pressures. This theme draws attention to the various ways in which schools have responded to the school standards discourse. In particular, it examines how the prioritisation of London put pressure on schools (through, for example, the school accountability regime) to raise standards. It sets out this data in the context of the possible implications for Black children.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>The prioritisation of public problems</b>	<b>School accountability</b>	<b>Policy pressures</b>
<b>Codes</b>	De-prioritisation of race – Black children	School accountability	School effectiveness
	Prioritisation of race – White children	Data hegemony	Intervention programmes
	Prioritisation of London	Targets and performance measures	Responding to targets and prioritisation
	Underachievement	Performativity	Gaming
		School surveillance	

### **Computer assisted data analysis**

I used a ‘computer assisted qualitative data analysis’ (Ezzy, 2002:111) package (NVivo) in order to assist me in coding and analysing the data I generated from the fieldwork. Whilst I am mindful, as highlighted by Ezzy (2002), that computer assisted qualitative data analysis packages can only assist or facilitate this process, they do have the potential to expedite the data coding and analysing process. Indeed, assisted qualitative data analysis packages have

become so important that Delamont (1992) argued that qualitative researchers who do not make use of such software have to defend their decision not to do so. As I undertook more interviews and developed a firmer set of themes, I used NVivo to assist in the analysis process. I selected this particular tool because I am familiar with it and because it has the ability to process a range of information and documentation in different formats, such as my Word produced interview transcripts, PDFs of national policy documents and audio files of interviews.

Of course, computer assisted qualitative data analysis programmes do have their limitations. There is, for example, the potential that these packages can unduly influence a researcher's analytical strategies (Ezzy, 2002). The most significant problem I encountered, however, was that I found the process of using the software debilitating, as it was often difficult to see all the data and re-code and reorganise it with ease. It was much more effective to use manual techniques that gave me the ability to constantly change and amend codes and themes (although I recognise this was in part the result of my lack of proficiency). It is for this reason, however, that developing my own codes, keeping notes and annotating interview scripts was an invaluable part of the research process.

### **Ethical considerations**

In this chapter, I have already addressed a number of issues with regard to ethics. Therefore, in this section I want to focus on the remaining areas that must also be considered. As I have alluded to at various points in this chapter, social research inevitably poses a number of ethical questions that require careful consideration; such as what should individuals be told about the content of social research and what protection can be given to participants? (Burgess, 1989). These questions, amongst others, equally apply to my own study. For example, one of the most significant ethical issues I confronted was how I would safeguard the identities of the participants (particularly the civil servants). The small sample I used meant that there was the potential that the officials, as well as the schools the participants work in, could be identified. It was imperative, therefore, that I achieved the aims of my study, whilst avoiding any adverse consequences for the participants. As a result, in

undertaking the fieldwork and setting out my findings, I adhered to the British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidance for Educational Research (2011:4), which includes a commitment to respect 'the person, knowledge, democratic values, the quality of educational research and academic freedom'. This has involved limiting the amount of information I have divulged about the civil servants who participated in the research. For example, whilst I have briefly outlined who the participants were, given the limited number of people in the Department for Education working on education policy in London (particularly those at a senior level), I have chosen not to disclose their ethnicity and their specific roles. In doing so, I understand that the reader cannot fully appraise the validity of the accounts given by the participants as, for example, the ethnicity of the candidates can affect their interpretation of education policy (including its enactment) and, therefore, the comments they make.

With the British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidance for Educational Research in mind, I also undertook several additional measures. First, I kept to a code of confidentiality and anonymity. As a consequence, all participants and institutions they worked for (with the exception of the Department for Education) were given alternative names. I informed all the participants of this at the beginning of the interviews. Second, I retained all the data. I did not share any of it with the participants' employers or other institutions in advance of writing up the thesis. Third, as I was undertaking snowball sampling, I invited the participants to recommend other professionals that I could also interview, but I did not confirm or deny with referrers or referees which other professionals I interviewed. Fourth, as I made reference to above, I made use of my own relationships with teachers in order to seek out appropriate and willing participants (although I was careful not to share my list of interviewees and avoided writing clearly identifiable aspects of their schools that may have suggested who they were). However, I invited all professionals to participate on a voluntary basis.

I also had to determine whether it was ethical to only raise race as a topic of discussion if the participants did so first (even though race was the focus of my research). I was determined not to deceive the participants. As a result, I briefed the candidates on my research topic

prior to interviewing them, but I allowed them to steer the nature of the debate during the interviews. Therefore, I believe that I struck the right balance between transparency and the research technique I sought to deploy in order to elicit valid data.

### **Presenting the data**

As I set out at the beginning of this chapter, I used semi-structured interviews and documentary research methods throughout my fieldwork. In this thesis, the data I draw on from the fieldwork is presented in an integrated format (i.e. primary and secondary data are set out alongside each other). However, in order to ensure the reader is able to distinguish between the two forms of data, the primary data is set out in italics.

In addition to this, the data is the spoken and written words of teachers, officials, advisors and government ministers and their departments. In order to make clear the roles each of these individuals undertake, I have used acronyms of their title/role. See Table 4 for the abbreviations and Appendix D and F for further information about the roles these individuals undertook.

<b>AHT</b>	Assistant Headteacher
<b>CALS</b>	Chief Adviser for London Schools
<b>Ch.HoCEC</b>	Chair of the House of Commons Education Committee
<b>CS</b>	Civil Servant
<b>DHT</b>	Deputy Headteacher
<b>DLC</b>	Director of London Challenge
<b>DPM</b>	Deputy Prime Minister
<b>HMCI</b>	Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector, Ofsted
<b>HT</b>	Headteacher
<b>MoL</b>	Mayor of London
<b>MoS</b>	Minister of State
<b>MwP</b>	Minister without Portfolio
<b>PUSoS</b>	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
<b>PM</b>	Prime Minister
<b>SoS</b>	Secretary of State

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have set out the methodological framework for carrying out the fieldwork. In the next chapter, therefore, I will begin to draw attention to the data I gathered and the conclusions I reached based on my analysis.

## 5. Why Race Matters

The goal of racial equality is, while comforting to many whites, more illusory than real for blacks. For too long, we have worked for substantive reform, then settled for weakly worded and poorly enforced legislation, indeterminate judicial decisions, token government positions, even holidays.

Derrick Bell (1992:12)

The interests of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites.

Derrick Bell (1980:523)

### **Introduction**

In the introduction, I questioned whether race equality policy solely derives from the protests and sacrifices of the Black community or might such advancement be better explained by interest convergence. In this chapter, I begin to address this issue by seeking to understand (a) the extent to which underachievement was considered a problem and a government priority during the time this thesis is concerned with, (b) the policies successive governments enacted to address the problem and who they were targeted at and (c) what motivated the policy choices made by successive governments when seeking to address the problem.

I begin by setting out the data in relation to underachievement. I focus on how underachievement was understood by successive governments and schools, who they considered the underachieving groups to be, the extent to which the underachievement of Black children in particular was a priority and the policies the data suggests were enacted to address this problem. I then consider why there was a heightened level of policy enactment in London and the impact this may have had on the attainment of Black children.



Subsequently, I will argue that (a) the policies enacted to address race inequality in education have been symbolic and (b) the most effective of those policies at addressing underachievement of Black children in London were not intended to serve the interests of this group nor address their concerns, but those of the White middle class. As a consequence, I will conclude that the enactment of education policy in London can be accounted for in the CRT concept of interest convergence. What I mean by this is that the interests of Black children in achieving racial equality (i.e. raising their educational attainment) was only accommodated when they converged with the interests of their White counterparts (Bell, 1980).

### **The attainment gap**

The starting point for this investigation was to establish whether, during the period this thesis is concerned with, a shared understanding existed amongst politicians, officials and senior leaders with regard to what underachievement meant, who the underachieving groups were and whether addressing underachievement was a priority for successive governments. When I asked the participants what they considered underachievement in education to mean, very few addressed the question directly. Those that did responded with little clarity and offered varied views (in some cases considerably). One of the participants, for example, associated underachievement with expectations:

*[Those that underachieve are] children who aren't meeting the basic expectations. It's not even the Teach First<sup>21</sup> model that every child should be a nuclear physicist. It's a case that if you do well then that is a surprise, and if you don't do well you were never going to do very well anyway (...) so the level of expectation wasn't there (Mr Foster, AHT).*

Ms Maguire (DHT) spoke about underachievement in relation to the attainment of different social groups:

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<sup>21</sup> Teach First is an accelerated graduate programme that trains and supports professions to become teachers in schools in challenging circumstances (often in terms of performance).

*[Underachievement is] getting academic qualifications beneath what you could have done, if all things were equal (...). Remember the party conference when Tony Blair, just after he had a baby, said in his speech about the chances his child would have as opposed to another child would have done if he were in a different culture or home.*

One of the participants claimed that underachievement was far more than educational attainment and offered some additional factors that should be taken into consideration:

*It's a mixture between expected and actual grades; attendance, behaviour, effort according to reports. Staff recommendations are also taken into account. There are a number of different variant; it cannot only be academic (Mr O'Leary, AHT).*

Whilst this is only a small amount of data and, therefore, would be strengthened through further, specific research, it is significant because, despite successive governments claiming that the underachievement of Black children was a problem that they were committed to addressing (see, for example, DfES, 2003), it suggests that the participants did not hold a collective definition of underachievement. It is, therefore, right to question how governments sought to tackle the issue of underachievement when it may have been the case that no clear definition of the problem (that was widely understood by senior leaders) existed. The relevance of this does, however, depend on one's perspective in relation to these matters. For example, if schools are afforded the flexibility to identify and set priorities based on their own definitions of problems (such as underachievement), it allows for some groups to be prioritised that otherwise would not. However, this may allow for the underachievement of particular groups to go unidentified. This is a point I shall return to later in this chapter.

### **Prioritising the attainment gaps**

A key aspect of analysis in this area was to understand the extent to which inequality, in the broadest sense, was a salient issue in education. The data suggests that it was. For example, one of the participants said the following in relation to the priorities of New Labour:

*When I came into post the Department's priorities were (1) to raise standards and (2) narrow gaps (Mr Dyce, CS).*

Another participant claimed that the attainment gap was an important consideration when reviewing policy:

*We knew that we needed to be more refined in how we considered the impact of policies, particularly the fine details of what we want to do and how we're going to achieve it in a more scientific and robust way. And that was related to the issue of the gaps in attainment (Mr Fitzpatrick, AHT & CS).*

Contained in a response to a separate question, another participant said the following:

*I think in systems terms; as a Civil Servant you think about closing the attainment gaps (Mr Hammond, CS).*

Similar references are made in the secondary data. For example, Ed Balls (SoS), who was a Secretary of State for Education in the New Labour administration, said the following:

*It is still the case that children's educational chances are being affected by where they live and the income of their parents rather than their abilities. We have been making progress, but there is a lot more to do (Cited in Parliament. House of Commons, 2008:e7).*

In addition, Michael Gove (SoS), who was a Secretary of State for Education in the Coalition government, and Nicky Morgan (SoS), who was a Secretary of State for Education in the Coalition and Conservative administrations, said the following:

We are determined to do everything we can to make sure that every child, from every background, is given an equal opportunity to succeed. Over the last 3 years, this has been our top priority (Gove, 2013.para.32-33).

Our mission in government and my mission in the Department for Education is to deliver educational excellence everywhere (...). That means extra support for the most disadvantaged and those who need the most help (Morgan, 2015.para.18).

What is interesting about the statements from the politicians is their focus on economic deprivation. Yet, with regard to whom the underachieving groups were during the timeframe this thesis is concerned with, the data suggests that several different groups were, overtime, identified by governments. For example, one of the participants said the following:

*Labour I think had an ethnic minority achievement unit in the Department and there was a big focus on kids from different ethnic backgrounds and quite a lot on gifted and talented (Mrs Watson, CS).*

In addition to different ethnic groups, Mr Fitzpatrick (AHT & CS) referred to children eligible for FSM, which is a poverty indicator:

*To be honest, as a slightly late comer to the Department, in terms of your question about what gap, it was very much the free school meals gap and other wider gaps ethnic minority gaps.*

With regard to the Coalition, Mr Dyce (CS) also identified children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) as being a focus:

*There was work on SEN and the Pupil Premium, but no work on ethnic groups. There's some looking at disadvantage too.*

Mr Parker (AHT) made a similar point with regard to his perception of the Coalition's priorities:

*If you're asking me what I really believe, I think it will expose underachievement in terms of class rather than race. I think that you will find that people that come from the most deprived households, where they don't have books to read, where they don't have a culture of education, where nobody has been to university in the family.*

From the perspective of other senior leaders, similar groups were identified:

*We had not had any GCSE results, so in terms of who might be the underachieving groups, we didn't know who they were. Based on previous knowledge, White working class boys and Black boys (Mrs Ainsworth, DHT).*

Ms Maguire (DHT) was less specific, but appears to suggest that ethnicity, amongst others (although unspecified) factors, could be taken into consideration:

*When you're trying to raise achievement you have to check everyone achieves. You have to look at individual children and not just ethnicity. You have to check the stats and question yourself to see patterns.*

Mr Sandbrook (AHT) made a similar observation:

*The groups that are often focused on are free school meals. Previously it was on Black boys and now it's White boys being a key area to focus on. For me, I always want to ask why that group when every student is an individual.*

In addition to ethnicity, Mr Parker (AHT) mentioned children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and children eligible for FSM:

*We have a mind both at the start of the process and at the end of the process as to where we are with achievement in terms of ethnicity. But not just that either, I mean it's about free school meals, it's about converting our SEN students which, we do particularly well with.*

Children who are economically disadvantaged were also raised by other participants. Mr Sandbrook (AHT), for example, said the following:

*One thing that is linked to raising standards is closing the gap. So this idea of students from the poorest backgrounds, it is normally based on income as opposed to ethnicity or another other factors, so closing the gap is about making sure children are not disproportionately outperformed by the obviously more well-off students.*

It is arguably the case that this example is a classic case of 'gap talk' (Gillborn, 2008a:240; Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2013), which I first made reference to in the abstract. What I mean by this is that the participants' accounts above, as well as those of others, give rise to important questions about the negative impact misconceptions concerning inequalities in attainment can lead to (i.e. misunderstandings about the nature of, and extent to which there is, an attainment gap) and, moreover, perpetuate (indeed entrench) racial inequality (ibid). For example, the data set out above suggests that Black children, White British children (particularly boys) from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and children eligible for FSM were considered a priority for a least a period of time during the timeframe this thesis is concerned with. Establishing this is necessary because it gives rise to important questions concerning the extent to which Black children were prioritised and the effect of this status on their attainment. It is to these issues I now wish to turn.

### **Ethnicity and the attainment gap**

As I explained above, multiple groups were identified as priorities for successive governments. However, in order to try and establish how race and attainment was understood during the period this thesis is concerned with, I want to focus on Black children, but also the so-called 'White working class'. As I made reference to in the

methodology, I decided that I would only raise race as a topic for discussion in the interviews if the participants did. The purpose for doing so was to gauge the saliency of race as a public policy problem at government level and in schools. With regard to the identification of Black children as an underachieving group, at a government level some of the participants claimed that Black boys were a particular focus for New Labour:

*Black boys were a big focus of the last government and it did actually do quite a lot. When the government works out its data, quite a lot of the analysis year on year said that Black boys were underachieving relative to their peers at the same starting point and tended to get excluded more. They were much worse than any other comparable group, so that prompted a lot of thinking (Mrs Watson, CS).*

*When you're trying to look at the issues in London, you have to look at some of the issues affecting Black Caribbean boys (Mr Dyce, CS).*

Mr Fitzpatrick (AHT & CS), however, appeared to disagree with this:

*Ethnic minority achievement was a small part of the Department. It was not really that high profile.*

With regard to Black children being a priority for schools, Mr Wilson (AHT) stated that the focus afforded to Black boys was the result of comparisons made between ethnic groups:

*Well, last year and to an extent this year, it has been young Black men. Particularly those who were identified as School Action Plus [an SEN category]. They stand out as those who underachieved last year compared to other groups.*

He went on to offer an example to illustrate his point:

*We've just identified the students who underachieved without any regard to the context, but then what's quite interesting is that this [he produced a list of students in Year 10] is the*

*group of students who are going to lose an option in the current Year 10 when they're in Year 11 because they have underachieved in English and maths. You just need to go down the list to see that primarily they're boys and the majority of them are Black.*

Nevertheless, some of the participants stated that it was difficult to prioritise specific groups because of the diversity of the cohorts in their schools:

*It's hard to tell in inner city schools, as some groups are not significant enough. In this area sixty-three different languages are spoken. How much you get under the skin of these issues is difficult to say (Mrs Ainsworth, DHT).*

*It's very easy in this school, because the school is so diverse, there's no homogeneity about it at least, so there's no invitation to see any students in any group and underachievement is not tethered to other characteristics with possibly the exception of children with Special Educational Needs (Ms Carrington, HT).*

*The biggest driver is those on course for five A\* to C, including English and maths. However, it tends to be names that go in those groups. That is right because none of these groups are homogenous. Generalisations across large numbers is useful but given the Year 11 cohort has been on average 130/140 we are talking about names, faces and people (Mr Parker, AHT).*

Mr Sandbrook (AHT) claimed that the school focused on Black boys through, for example, the establishment of a working group of teachers to identify best practice in raising the attainment of this group. He appears to suggest, however, that their underachievement was not a priority:

*Another concern in the school was the African Caribbean group, but I'm not convinced anything productive came from the group. One of the Assistant Heads said they cared about it. There was about ten people who went three or four times but I didn't get any feedback (...) The feedback was kind of "we've met and had an interesting discussion".*



This was also the view of Mr Llywelyn (HT):

*When we did some research we were surprised that it [the underachievement of Black children] wasn't a priority in schools. Even schools in inner London which have multicultural intakes we sort of assumed they were for equal opportunities (...) but they hadn't taken some of those issues on board and didn't really have very many ways of talking about it.*

Ms Maguire (DHT) claimed that the issue in her school was the disproportionate number of Black children subject to school exclusion:

*There is an achievement gap in my school. Our aim is to close that gap, but at the very least that it does not get any bigger. Our governors' report show exclusions are higher amongst Black Caribbean students.*

Ms Lee (AHT) also made reference to the disproportionate number of Black children subject to school exclusion and claimed that this was a reflection of the education system being institutionally racist:

*Personally, it would be a travesty to say we solved issues of race. Education still is institutionally racist and you look at exclusion figures and see there are increased numbers of Black boys excluded for the same thing locally and nationally.*

Mr Llywelyn (HT) claimed that the perception of Black children being poorly behaved was an issue as well as setting and streaming:

*There was an assumption that Black kids behaved badly. To some extent that was true because it was a self-fulfilling prophecy as they behaved badly and staff expected them to behave badly.*

*We've not moved on from Black kids being in lower sets. I don't think we have moved entirely from that.*

Mr Fitzpatrick (AHT & CS) claimed that the attainment of Black children was not a priority in school because it was not a priority for government:

*[Ethnic minority achievement] was a small part of the Department. That's why in any school I've been to it's always a little bit like this is what the SENCO does. I mean like really?*

The data in this section raises several issues in relation to the priority afforded to race and, in particular, the underachievement of Black children. For example, the data suggests that, during its time in office, New Labour attempted to address Black children's underachievement (it may even have been a priority for a period of time). Yet, the participants seemed reticent in discussing issues of race, racism and Black children's underachievement. For instance, as I stated earlier, I decided that I would only raise race as a topic for discussion if the participants did so first. The outcome was that the Black Country (a location for one of New Labour's intervention programmes) was mentioned more often by the officials and senior leaders than the underachievement of Black children. One must, of course, consider whether the participants' reluctance to discuss race was due to my sample consisting of a disproportionate number of senior leaders from schools in which underachievement amongst Black children did not exist. Yet, if this were the case, given that officials enact regional and national policy, I would have expected those that I interviewed to have more proactively identified the underachievement of Black children as an issue if it were a priority for successive governments. Furthermore, there is research to substantiate the reticence of the participants to discuss race. For example, the findings of an evaluation of Aiming High found that some staff were either reluctant to acknowledge issues of race, or were resistant to the prioritisation of African Caribbean pupils (Tikly et al., 2006). In a further piece of research headteachers were found to be indifferent in their engagement with the underachievement of Black children as a problem (DfES, 2006).

Therefore, it is reasonable for one to consider alternative explanations for the participants' reticence to discuss this problem. For example, notwithstanding the data that suggests New Labour may have at some point attempted to address the underachievement of Black

children, there is sufficient evidence to contend that the attention afforded to this problem by successive governments was limited. Moreover, it is arguably the case that the focus afforded to this problem was not only limited, but that successive governments failed to prioritise it at all, or at best de-prioritised it after a short period of attention. Indeed, as Warmington et al. (2017:1) argued, in the last 50 years 'race equality has rocked back and forth between the margins and the centre of education policy'. There is scholarly work to support this view. For example, Gillborn (2005:493) found that New Labour made just one reference to Black and minority ethnic groups and the words racism, discrimination and prejudice did not appear, in its five-year, 100-page plan on education published in 2004. He concluded that 'the five-year strategy prioritized an official version of 'standards' in education' (ibid) that failed to consider the attainment of Black children. John (2006:1) found that, in New Labour's 2005 White Paper, Black and minority ethnic children were 'disposed of in three paragraphs' in a document that ran to one hundred and sixteen pages. In addition, Warmington et al. (2017:11) arrived at the following conclusion from their research:

Perhaps the most pervasive feature of the interviews was the perception among stakeholders that, within both mainstream political and educational debate, issues of race and racism were considered "done and dusted". Race equality issues were marginalised not just because they were perceived by policy-makers as outside of or inimical to "quality" and "standards" but also because they were regarded as anachronistic, as having been dealt with.

These findings act as further evidence in support of the view that what now exists in society is the 'post-racial fallacy' (Gillborn et al., 2016:4) that I first referred to in the introduction (Gillborn, 2003, 2005; Archer and Francis, 2005; Gillborn et al., 2016). Moreover, the data above may lead one to conclude that race and racism are considered peripheral issues in society when they should be, as CRT scholars have argued central to understanding the experiences of Black people (Crenshaw, 1988; Gilroy, 1990; Tate, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Gillborn, 2005, 2008; Hylton, 2012). Therefore, in education race 'fails to act as a central point of examination' (Ladson-Billings, 1996:254) and that those in control of it have failed to

comprehend 'the endemic nature of racism' (Jackson, 2011:435) and 'cannot locate themselves within a larger system of racial oppression' (ibid). Yet, as Mekada Graham and Gill Robinson (2004:659), stated 'there can be no denial of the saliency of racism affecting the life chances, aspirations and opportunities of young Black people'.

The dominance of colour-blindness (which I first referenced in chapter 2) may assist in explaining the reluctance to discuss race and the failure to afford the underachievement of Black children the saliency, urgency and prioritisation it required. The colour-blind approach is 'a figurative way of claiming an inability or refusal to talk about race or its implications' (Agosto et al., 2015:788). For example, Taylor (1998:124) argued that it is 'less painful and upsetting for most whites to simply deny, usually not maliciously, that racism exists'. What is more, if one also considers that the colour-blind approach acts as a 'hegemonic practice that operates as a mask to preserve the investment that people who are White have in racism' (Agosto et al, 2015:788), one can begin to understand that this approach is also a continuation of 'the theory of white superiority and black inferiority' (Mutua, 2006: 332), but is simply presented as a more socially acceptable way of dealing with racism. The data above, for example, exemplifies the way in which the marginalisation of issues of race has served as a means of subordinating Black children's underachievement and promoting issues of concern to White people (such as the White working class, which is an issue I address in more detail later in this chapter). It is evidence such as this that makes colour-blindness 'the dominant moral compass of social enlightenment about race' (Crenshaw et al., 1995: xv). Furthermore, it is arguably the case that the colour-blind approach is a manifestation of the wider neoliberal agenda in education that has sought to de-politicise issues such as racial inequality (Tate, 1997, Canen and Peters, 2005; Clarke, 2012). For example, Clarke (2012:297) argued that the enactment of neoliberal policies has been 'deeply depoliticising in the sense of reducing properly political concerns to matters of technical efficiency'. It is arguably the case that this is evident in the way in which racial inequality has been re-framed as simply a problem concerning the quality and effectiveness of schooling. Canen and Peters (2005:311) argued that this is a result of 'tensions' in the education system:

In a globalised era, tensions have been pinpointed between movements towards homogeneity of policies and practices in education – particularly represented by models grounded in market-oriented approaches towards efficiency and accountability – and those that take cultural diversity, democracy and citizenship-building as the core of their approaches.

Canen and Peters (2005:311) argued that former is a manifestation of the way in which neoliberalism ‘individualises policy in terms of ‘consumers’’ which, somewhat paradoxically, fails to consider cultural difference even when markets are intended to be cater for the demands of the individual. These are issues that I will discuss in further detail in chapter 7 when I explore the approach schools have taken to raising standards.

In sum, the data in this section gives rise to the view that successive governments and schools failed to consider the underachievement of Black children as a problem and that colour-blindness can explain why. This view is consistent with the argument made by some CRT scholars who contend that the way in which problems are defined can frame the construction and interpretation of policies (Tate, 1997). In the next section, therefore, I want to focus on the policies governments have enacted in order to address the underachievement of Black children.

### **Policy enactment and the liberal outlook**

Some of the participants made specific reference to government policies enacted by New Labour aimed at addressing the underachievement of Black children. Mrs Watson (CS), for example, stated the following:

*We had the Ethnic Minority Achievement Unit in the Department and there was a big focus on kids from different ethnic backgrounds.*

In addition, one of the participants said the following:

*Aiming High taught us that there was an issue with Black Caribbean students, but that there were other groups that presented issues, such as Portuguese and White British students. It became more apparent with the increase in tracking and analysis (Mr Parker, AHT).*

Aiming High was enacted by New Labour. It claimed that it was the first single strategy for raising the attainment of Black students. In the Aiming High consultation document, New Labour stated the following:

The first ever census data on minority ethnic achievement confirms that Chinese and Indian young people achieve better than average GCSE results. But it also shows a long tail of underachievement for many Black and Pakistani pupils in particular. So there is no room for complacency. For these pupils, the achievement gaps remain unacceptably wide (DfES, 2003:1)

Stephen Twigg (PUSOS), who was a Minister at the DfE, made the following remarks:

We have three important levers which we believe will give schools a firm basis to move forward. First, the annual school census now enables us to monitor the achievement of minority ethnic pupils (...). Second, the Race Relations (Amendment) Act places a new statutory duty on schools to assess and monitor the impact of policies on minority ethnic pupils, staff and parents (...). Third, the ethnic minority achievement grant worth £155m a year which seeks to raise the achievement of minority ethnic pupils (Twigg, 2003.para.23-26)

The underlying causes may be complex, but we are determined to address them. For the best schools already show us the way to deliver high standards for their minority ethnic pupils (Cited in DfE, 2003:1).

In addition, in justifying the enactment of Aiming High New Labour stated the following:

There are two further reasons why such action is timely. First, the annual school census now enables us to monitor the achievement of minority ethnic pupils locally and nationally on a consistent basis. It makes the nature of our challenge that much clearer. Second, the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 places a new statutory duty on schools to assess the impact of their policies on minority ethnic pupils, staff and parents, and to monitor the attainment of minority ethnic pupils (DfES, 2003:4).

There are, however, several issues with Aiming High. First, it is highly questionable whether Aiming High can be described as a strategy, given that it lacked a clear approach to addressing the underachievement of Black children (the references made to the relatively high performance of Chinese and India children is an issue I discuss later in this chapter). Second, Aiming High is evidence of the way in which policy problems are considered by governments to be 'complex' (which is a very vague term), but what then follows are confident and technical solutions of the nature I referred to earlier (i.e. issues of inequality can be explained by poor quality provision and school ineffectiveness). Third, this data gives rise to the view that there was little, except for Aiming High, that represented an actual policy response to the underachievement of Black children.

Nevertheless, Aiming High did recognise the injustice of the achievement gap and offered several key factors, beyond poverty, for why Black children underachieved. Yet, in listing the factors which may explain this particular attainment gap, including low teacher expectations, the period of schooling a child receives in the UK, low parental education and aspirations, poor fluency in English, institutional racism was listed as the *final* factor (DfES, 2003:4). The document did, however, state that in order to understand why some ethnic minorities underachieve, or to raise their attainment, the system needed to be reviewed:

We need to look seriously at the impact of policies, practice and procedures within schools and the wider education system (ibid).

In relation to Black children specifically, the document stated the following:

Although there is a gender difference in the statistics for African Caribbean pupils, evidence suggests that African Caribbean girls are also subject to a range of stereotypes by their teachers and are more likely to be excluded from school than their white counterparts. African Caribbean pupils in general are four times more likely to be excluded from school, usually for what is defined by schools as 'challenging behaviour'. Black Caribbean pupils also tend to be over-represented in some types of special schools (DfES, 2003:32)

It then made the case for why these issues had to be addressed:

It is clear then that inequalities are differentially experienced by groups and that, if left to chance, African Caribbean pupils will continue to be failed by the system and to be vulnerable to involvement in the youth and criminal justice system (ibid).

With regard to specific policies on ethnic minority achievement, the document proposed that the government publish the results achieved by different minority ethnic groups (which had already begun), require Ofsted to report on the response of schools and LEAs on meeting the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act, improve the training of school leaders and other school staff, ensure that minority ethnic pupils are not disproportionately excluded from school, develop a framework for bilingual students and raise their achievement and reduce exclusions of African Caribbean children (DfES, 2003).

This consultation document, as well as the related data, present several potential issues. First, it is important to point out that some of the research into the effectiveness of the policy arrived at a negative judgement of its success. Tikly et al (2006), for example, found that the results of African Caribbean pupils attending Aiming High schools improved at KS4 (based on the old headline measure of 5 or more A\*-C grades), but that these results were lower than the average for Aiming High schools and lower than the national average for Black



Caribbean pupils. This gives rise to the view that, despite the commitments and the policies enacted as a result of *Aiming High*, very little action took place in schools subsequent to this.

In addition to this, many of the salient strategies in the document give rise to the view that Black children are in some way deficient. What I mean by this is that their underachievement is a result of the student (including being in some way inferior to their peers), as opposed to the policies of the school (Graham and Robinson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2006, 2006a). For example, under the heading 'effective teaching and learning' (DfE, 2003:13) the document states the following:

Lessons are planned and delivered as effectively as possible, with support provided for bilingual pupils. And teachers are able to reflect the cultures and identities of the communities represented in the school in their lessons (ibid)

In addition, with regard to behaviour, it states the following:

We need to develop in all teachers the confidence and skills to manage diverse classrooms and respond positively and effectively to different groups within the classroom. A key area in relation to African Caribbean pupils is the need to reduce exclusions. The Department's guidance on managing behaviour in schools helps teachers to understand the issues faced by African Caribbean pupils, and discuss ways to avoid or at least manage conflict in a positive way and to model this behaviour for all pupils (DfE, 2003:13).

CRT scholars suggest these so-called strategies presume that Black children are deficient (Ladson-Billing, 1998, Gillborn, 2003). As a result, they offer technical solutions. Ladson-Billing, (1998:5), for example, contended that schools are consumed by 'never-ending quest for "the right strategy or technique" to deal with (read: control at-risk read: African American) students'. One could argue that this is also the case for Black children in England.

In addition, the Aiming High document referred to institutional racism as a potential cause of underachievement, but it failed to contextualise what institutional racism is or what it may look like in a school setting, which is significant given that it was enacted in the aftermath of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry. Indeed, the document did not even go as far as to recognise that institutional racism exists in English schools. Instead, the reader was left to arrive at his or her own interpretation of the implicit and insignificant references to the issue.

It is also important to point out that Mr Parker (AHT) was the only participant to make any reference to Aiming High and, with the exception of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Unit, no other policies from a national level were mentioned. For example, the participants could have referred to the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (although evidence from the DfES (2003) suggests this was primarily spent on students with EAL). There may be a number of legitimate reasons for the absence of these references in the primary data. For example, some of the participants were not in post when Aiming High was launched, they may not have been in schools in which the programme was targeted, they may not have seen it as relevant to my questioning or they may have forgotten about the programme (had I asked about this specific programme the response might have been different). Yet, the absence of this programme as a reference to Black children's underachievement brings into question its significance, longevity and impact on the education system.

This data, including the extracts I set out at the beginning of this section, suggests that Aiming High represented the entirety of New Labour's policy response to the underachievement of Black children. Indeed, Tikly et al. (2006) argued that even this policy was only enacted to support schools in fulfilling their duties under the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000). This gives rise to the view that policy in this area was only ever symbolic and intended to appease the Black community. If one compares, for example, the enactment of Aiming High with other New Labour policies, it is possible to substantiate this claim. The reform programme it enacted in other areas of education policy was predicated on robust accountability mechanisms, government intervention where there was underperformance and political leadership from influential government ministers

(McAleavy and Elwick, 2016). Yet, there was very little evidence of these mechanisms in the enactment of policy concerned with race equality and Aiming High in particular. It is arguably the case, therefore, that Aiming High was emblematic of the 'liberal order' (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001:3) that many CRT scholars reject. What I mean by this is that it formed part of the 'inclusive and impressive façade' (Gillborn, 2008: 28) that has governed progress towards racial equality since the civil rights era (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Mutua, 2006; Gillborn, 2008; Bell, 2016; Taylor, 2016). Indeed, Berkeley (2006:xiv) argued, some were 'dismayed at the disregard of good practice already around in favour of cold-start and kick-start models that could deliver a quick fix with media appeal but with inevitably limited success and sustainability'.

If one accepts that policies such as Aiming High were enacted for symbolic reasons, the data in this section may also lead one to arrive at the conclusion that policies specifically targeted at addressing the underachievement of Black children may not be the best way to realise race equality. It is, however, important to point out that critics would reject this view and seek to present a more positive picture of the work successive governments have undertaken in order to raise the attainment of Black children. They are likely to point to the investment and relatively recent improvements in Black children's educational achievement as *evidence* to the contrary. In particular, they may draw on improvements in the headline performance measure in order to substantiate their argument. In addition, Tikly et al. (2006:10) found that Aiming High was 'highly effective' in raising awareness of African Caribbean issues in schools, which enabled schools staff to include African Caribbean achievement within mainstream schools' planning.

### **Black children's attainment and schools**

With regard to the policies developed and enacted in schools to address the underachievement of Black children, there were some differences in responses. For example, in terms of discussing how to address the attainment gap, one of the participants said the following:

*If you talk about ethnicity, people become wary. Generally, because of what has happened in the past 20 years. In the eighties, in response to racism in the police, we had the Brixton riots. Ok, they asked what are we doing for Black and ethnic minority groups? Money was allocated for different groups on Trevor Phillips's ideas on multiculturalism. Be careful of that in schools, I think you have to be in favour of things that catch everybody, in order to catch the stats (Ms Maguire, DHT).*

Ms Maguire (DHT) appears to have suggested that schools were cautious about enacting policies that targeted specific groups. However, Mr Sandbrook (AHT), seems to have been more concerned with the lack of success such policies realised:

*What do you do with that group [Black Caribbean children] when it's a huge group in the school? What do you do? (...) There's a lot of cultural baggage that you get with any group, but you do get it with that group.*

It is arguably the case that Mr Sandbrook's (AHT) comment, particularly in reference to his assertion that Black children have "cultural baggage" is consistent with the deficit model of thinking I referred to earlier.

Ms Maguire (DHT) went on to claim that if a specific group was to be targeted a clear rationale would be required and that other factors had to be taken into consideration:

*You have to be very careful how you set up intervention groups for particular groups and their needs. You must be very clear about the purpose, what they are doing, how long for and look at the bigger issues, the wider question (Ms Maguire, DHT).*

However, Mr Fitzpatrick (AHT & CS) claimed that schools have always been reluctant to act on issues concerning race:

*I feel there is always a tension in ethnic minority achievement which is the same with free school meals and pupil premium, but less so. It's between how much do you develop*

*interventions or policies specifically for those groups before they've had a chance to underachieve because they're in that group? There was a sense that we should be doing certain things because we happen to know that there is the tendency or a likelihood that that group will underachieve because of their background. It's really difficult and I don't know whether that has actually been considered or determined.*

One of the participants claimed that consideration had been given to the issue, but no additional policies or practices were being enacted to address the problem:

*I think something I'm conscious of is that we haven't really responded to that challenge in a very direct way, as far as I'm aware and certainly with regards to my own role we've simply been doing the same thing we've done before when we didn't know which group is going to be underachieving in this school (Mr Wilson, AHT).*

Mr Wilson (AHT) went on to claim that the age of the school (it had been open less than six years) may explain the inaction in this area:

*I think if you want reasons, I guess the school is quite young and is still trying to tackle other priorities and it has not yet got its head round how it's going to deal with the underachievement of that group [Black boys].*

In addition, Mr Fitzpatrick (AHT & CS) said the following:

*There are two major underachieving groups and we know that, but we don't do anything extra for them, but we know it and we analyse it but we don't do anything differently for example for African Caribbean girls. This would be wrong wouldn't it? Wouldn't it, or is it? (...) I don't know you see the tension?*

It is, however, important to point out that some of the participants argued that there was a commitment by teachers to equality that assisted in raising attainment:

*There are people in the school who are championing and thinking about all of the students. They will ask “what are you doing about this group of students or those students?” (Ms Carrington, HT).*

*There was a group of staff who were absolutely committed to equal opportunities. So one could use that bit of morality of young people to move some things forward (Mr Llywelyn, HT).*

The presence of what are often conflicting views is consistent with the argument made by Ball et al. (2012a:150) who arrived at the conclusion that schools consist of ‘competing and conflicting values, principles and desires’. This suggests there are a plurality of views that exist in schools and, therefore, may explain why some teachers were committed to race equality in a meaningful way.

### **Prioritising race**

The data in this chapter suggests that, during the time this thesis is concerned with, three actions took place for what were essentially political reasons: (1) the underachievement of Black children was prioritised, but was quickly moved down the agenda; (2) the policies enacted aimed at addressing this problem were symbolic; and (3) these actions precipitated the low priority the underachievement of Black children was afforded in schools. It is arguably the case that this was the result of institutional racism. I will explain why I have arrived at this conclusion, but given the importance I attached to institutional racism as a conceptual tool for advancing our understanding of racism beyond individual acts (see chapter 2), I want to explain why these actions were institutionally racist as opposed to acts of individual racism.

It is feasible for one to contend that the data suggests that individual racism, as well as colour-blindness (which in itself is inherently racist), can explain the approach taken by successive governments and schools to this problem. For example, if one considers racism to involve ‘practices which restrict the chances of success of individuals from a particular racial

or ethnic group' (Foster, 1990:5), it is possible to begin to construct an argument in support of the proposition that what is set out in the data represents a collection of individual racist acts. For example, there is some evidence of low expectations from politicians, officials and senior leaders; there is data which suggest that some ministers took a laissez-faire approach to addressing the problem; and it appears that the thoughts and actions of staff concerning Black children's attainment differed (for instance, some staff seemed to consider it to be a more significant problem than others). This allows one to surmise that had a different group of Ministers, or even a different political party, been in office they would have responded to the problem differently (which is consistent with the existence of individual racism).

However, the data does not suggest that politicians, officials or senior leaders failed to prioritise the underachievement of Black children because they were racist. This conclusion is consistent with research such as that conducted by Sewell (1997), who found little evidence in support of the view that individual racism in schools was the cause of Black children's underachievement. This does not mean that the individual acts of racism that Black people experience every day did not play a role in the three actions above (as it is almost certainly the case that they did). However, it is arguably the case that the kinds of activity that I have set out in the actions do not simply derive from individual acts of racism (whether colour-blindness or otherwise). As CRT contends, racism is not some random, isolated act of individuals behaving badly (Ladson-Billings, 2013:37). Therefore, given the data and the scholarly work in this field (which I have referenced in chapter 2), one must give credence to the argument that institutional racism may be the cause. As this thesis progresses, it is my intention to add further evidence in support of this view).

### **Institutional racism**

In chapter two, I set out the scholarly work concerned with the conceptualisation of institutional racism. I want to return to it here, as this form of racism is one of the explanations New Labour gave for why some ethnic minorities underachieved in the education system (DfES, 2003). Several references are made in the data to institutional racism, the Race Relations (Amendment) Act, the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (SLI) and the

subsequent Stephen Lawrence Report (SLR). For example, as I set out above, Ms Lee claimed that the education system was institutionally racist. In addition, references were made to institutional racism in Aiming High. For example, the consultation document stated the following:

The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry identified institutional racism as a major factor disadvantaging some minority ethnic groups (DfES, 2003:9).

The document also made specific reference to the SLI, SLR, institutional racism and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act in describing patterns of underachievement:

The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report identified 'institutional racism' in our public institutions. Institutional racism, because it is unintended, is often difficult to detect. But, using the data collection methods, we can now identify patterns in minority ethnic underachievement and look for the possible causes in the way the education system operates (DfES, 2003:11)

With regard to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act, the Aiming High document stated the following:

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act which was introduced in response to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry gives public authorities a statutory duty to promote race equality. The aim of the duty is to make promoting race equality central to the way public authorities work. This has important implications for the work of central government, local government, schools and other educational institutions (ibid).

It goes on to describe some of the implications for organisations that fail to act appropriately (including intervention from the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), which has now been superseded by the Equality and Human Rights Commission):



The Act has teeth. The CRE can enforce the specific duties by issuing a compliance notice. Failure to comply could result in legal action. Ofsted will inspect schools' compliance with the Act as part of their regular inspections (DfES, 2003:12).

The SLR has been influential in drawing attention to racism in education. Indeed, not only did Macpherson legitimise organisational definitions of institutional racism, the recommendations he made created a window of opportunity for academics and community activists to assert, with a degree of public and political attention, that the education system was also institutionally racist. This is evident in two particular passages of the SLR:

Racism, institutional or otherwise, is not the prerogative of the Police Service. It is clear that other agencies including for example those dealing with housing and education also suffer from the disease. If racism is to be eradicated there must be specific and co-ordinated action both within the agencies themselves and by society at large, particularly through the educational system (Macpherson, 1999:6.54).

If racism is to be eliminated from our society there must be a co-ordinated effort to prevent its growth. This need goes well beyond the Police Services. (...) [W]e cannot but conclude that to seek to address the well founded concerns of minority communities simply by addressing the racism current and visible in the Police Services without addressing the educational system would be futile. The evidence we heard and read forces us to the conclusion that our education system must face up to the problems, real and potential, which exist (Macpherson, 1999:46.34).

These extracts are important because, although institutional racism as a concept has a long history in the UK and the British education system has for some time been characterised as institutionally racist, they not only broach, but also legitimise the existence, if not the true extent, of the problem in this sector. Therefore, whilst the Lawrence case concluded almost 20 years ago, one should not underestimate its relevance to explaining the neoliberal approach taken by successive governments and schools to policy enactment and, more importantly, demonstrating the impact of institutional racism on the attainment of Black

children. For example, institutional racism may be the cause of the reticence of officials and senior leaders to discuss race and policy enactment aimed at addressing the problem. What I mean by this is that, whilst the data and much of the recent literature that I set out above does not suggest that individual acts of racism by officials or teachers is the main cause of Black children underachieving, one must consider that officials and senior leaders operate in an education system which is predicated on the collective assumption that Black children are in some way deficient (this is an argument I first referred to in chapter 2). It may be the case that these collective actions are 'unwitting' (Macpherson, 1999.para. 6.34), but that does not negate its presence. For example, institutional racism derives from the routine practices, which means an organisation may not be overtly or directly discriminatory (i.e. indirect racism), but discriminatory effects may remain. It is arguably the case, therefore, that the hesitance displayed by officials and senior leaders to discuss issues of racial inequality may be symptomatic of institutional racism.

There is one further point that requires consideration, which concerns the level at which institutional racism operates at (an issue I first addressed in chapter 2). One may consider any prioritisation of Black children's achievement (for however short a period of time) to be a positive action if it ensures heightened attention and even delivers some improvements. However, the problem with this school of thought is that when race equality is prioritised for alternative reasons than the substantive issue, there is a failure to consider the true extent and cause of the problem (i.e. it results in gap talk and the de-politicisation of political problems). It is arguably the case that, for example, the underachievement of Black children cannot be solved by solely focusing on the gap in attainment, whilst ignoring the deeper issues that gives rise to it. As Ladson-Billings (2006) argued, the attention paid to the achievement gap is akin to economics, in which one focuses on the deficit as oppose to the debt (i.e. we focus on current spending and not on the long-term accumulation of debt). Similarly, she argued that in education we focus on the achievement gap, which draws us to arrive at short term solutions, at the expense of the attention that is required on the long-term problems, such as the 'historic, economic and sociopolitical, and moral debt' (Ladson-Billings, 2006:9) of inequality in education (ibid). It is arguably the case that this short-term focus is emblematic of the prioritisation of Black children's underachievement in England,

which may explain why the data suggests that, for example, this issue had a low profile in government and schools. As a result, the data in this chapter gives rise to important questions about the circumstances in which policies to address the underachievement of Black children are most effective.

It may be the case that, for example, government policy that is enacted in response to the needs and demands of the White middle class, but in addition begin to address the underachievement of Black children, will be afforded proper consideration, resourced appropriately, awarded political credibility and, as a result, sustained over the long term. I will return to this issue later in this thesis.

### **The White Working Class**

As I explained earlier, I decided that I would only raise race as an issue in the interviews if the participants did. The result was that the officials and senior leaders were far more exercised by the underachievement of so-called White Working Class children than they were about any other ethnic group. In this section, therefore, I want to explore the relationship between race and class that arose from the data. In order to do so, I want to draw on the body of work within CRT known as 'intersectionality' (Crenshaw, 1988:141; 1991:124), which I first made reference to in chapter 2, in order to examine the intersection between race and social class. Mutua (2006:394), for example, advocated for 'Classcrits', who would question, for example, why the 'poor are disproportionately black or why blacks are disproportionately poor' and Delgado and Stefancic (2012:123) argued that many CRT scholars recognise that 'poverty and race intersect in complex ways'.

As I made reference to above, the underachievement of White Working Class children was much more of a focus in my interviews than any other ethnic group. For example, one of the participants said the following:

*It's about looking at individuals such as White Working Class boys, but also set aside categories and groups and look at the needs of the individual child (Ms Baines, AHT).*

In addition, Mrs Ainsworth (DHT) said the following:

*Most talk about groups such as boys and then the White Working Class in terms of a poverty indicator. This group is disadvantaged at home and are in an ethnically diverse, inner-city school.*

One of the participants was less specific about the social characteristics of the White children who were underachieving:

*There are an increased number of white kids underachieving (Mr O'Leary, AHT).*

Whether the identification of the so-called White Working Class (and White children more broadly) is the result of government policy is unclear, but one of the participants claimed that the underachieving groups his school focused on were determined by the government of the day:

*The government will dictate who should be the focus. They will say this group need focusing on (...), [but] we are trying to set our own agenda in terms of who we feel need most support (Mr O'Leary, AHT).*

In addition, some of the Civil Servants also identified so-called White Working Class children as a salient group. For example, one of the participants said they had been a priority for the Coalition:

*I think this government have been much more focused on White Working Class boys and free school meals; especially when the two things intersect (Mrs Watson, CS).*

In terms of explaining why, she offered the following reason:

*It's an interesting question, isn't it? Did Labour come in and tackle a whole load of massive presenting issues: London, EAL, Black boys? Big issues which they did quite a lot; and actually this government has come in and are tackling the remainder of the agenda? It's a legitimate way of thinking about it (Mrs Watson, CS).*

In highlighting the performance of London in comparison to other regions, Mr Carmichael (CS) said the following:

*London has some of the best schools in the country now (...) but White boys are our lowest achievers.*

The secondary data also suggests that the attainment of White Working Class children was a salient issue. For example, David Laws (MoS), who was a Minister of State at the DfE during the Coalition, said the following:

We can see that London does a lot better for all ethnic groups than outside of London, but we can still see that, even in London, the white groups are not doing as well as the ethnic groups. That ought to (...) lead us to reflect back on some of the characteristics of young people that explain whether they have high or low attainment (Cited in Parliament. House of Commons, 2014a: 6).

In addition, the DfE wrote the following in a written statement to the House of Commons Education Committee:

Many recent statistical studies have highlighted that social class is the strongest predictor of educational attainment in Britain (...). However, it is the underachievement of the white working-class in particular that is becoming a rising cause for concern (DfE, 2013a.para.1-2).

Michael Wilshaw (HMCI), who was the Chief Inspector of Ofsted at the time of writing, also identified White children as an underperforming group and made a particular case for why they should be a focus:

When we consider those children entitled to free school meals, it is the White British children who do worst out of all the main ethnic groups. The underperformance of low-income White British pupils matters, particularly because they make up the majority – two-thirds – of such pupils. So the lowest-performing group of poor children is also the largest. If we don't crack the problem of low achievement by poor White British boys and girls, then we won't solve the problem overall (Wilshaw, 2013.para.28).

Furthermore, the House of Commons Education Committee, in a report on the attainment of the White Working Class, stated the following:

White working class underachievement in education is real and persistent. White children who are eligible for free school meals are consistently the lowest performing group in the country, and the difference between their educational performance and that of their less- deprived white peers is larger than for any other ethnic group (Parliament. House of Commons, 2014:3)

Indeed, David Ward, who at the time was a member of the Committee said the following:

Is there clear evidence that anyone is speaking up for the white working class? I could get representatives and receive them from the Bangladeshi community complaining about "our children in our schools" or from the Pakistani community or the Kashmiri community. I find it difficult to think of a representative of the white working class who comes to me and says, "What about our children and our schools?" If they are, they are probably from the BNP, or would be accused of racism if they were to talk about the white working class (Cited in Parliament. House of Commons, 2014.b:4).

In addition to the data, there is scholarly work that suggests White Working Class children were a priority which I will draw on in the remainder of this section (Baars et al., 2016; Sharp et al., 2011; Bottero, 2009; DfE, 2013a; Gillborn, 2010; Ofsted, 2013; Parliament. House of Commons, 2014; Wilshaw, 2013).

I now want to examine why White Working Class children were a priority for successive governments, but before doing so it is important to state that socio-economic inequalities are deep-rooted and persistent problems in the education system. Indeed, as Francis et al. (2017:415) argued, 'social-class inequalities have characterised British state education since its introduction'. It is, however, equally important to draw attention to the inherent problems in education of discussing and prioritising 'White Working Class' children as they have been defined (Baars, 2016; Parliament. House of Commons, 2014; Gillborn, 2010, 2010). Much of the debate falls outside the scope of this thesis, but White Working Class children are defined as, more or less, White British children who are eligible for FSM. This indicator is often used for practical reasons. For example, Sharples et al. (2011) argued that whilst it is a simplistic measure, it is the main source of data schools hold on the income of a child's home background.

Consequently, there is a flawed assumption that eligibility for FSM equates to being working class, when that is questionable (Gillborn, 2009; Sharp et al., 2011; Parliament. House of Commons, 2014; Greaves et. al., 2014). It also appears to be the case that, at that time, some so-called White children could have been considered working class but were not entitled to FSM. In 2013, for example, the government reported that 40% of children living in poverty, as defined by the Child Poverty Act (2010), were not eligible for FSM (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013). In addition, the official FSM statistics exclude children who are eligible for the benefit but do not take up the offer (Gillborn et. al, 2012). What is more, Baars et al. (2016) arrived at the following conclusion:

It is clear that 'white working class' boys are defined and identified in numerous different ways, both in research and practice (...) [t]his poses challenges (...) and the

use of proxies such as Free School Meals and Pupil Premium eligibility has significant limitations.

Therefore, a more appropriate description of this social group might be children from low income families or children from an economically disadvantaged group. The problem is that the complexities of defining this social group is seldom referred to in the commentary about this issue.

The data in this section gives rise to the view that one disadvantaged group is being pitted against another. As Ladson-Billings (1996:254) argued, such an approach is in the end counterproductive:

By laying each of any number of differences side by side on the "multicultural table," we fail to engage in real struggle against any of them. We create a panoply of oppressions in which none is really important. Rather, people are pitted against each other to create a "hierarchy of differences" where we are encouraged only to care about that which we perceive to be directly impacting us.

The data set out above also suggests that solving the underachievement of the so-called 'White Working Class' is the only way in which the underachievement of other ethnic groups can be addressed. For example, in the statement above Michael Wilshaw (HMCI) stated that '[i]f we don't crack the problem of low achievement by poor White British boys and girls, then we won't solve the problem overall' (Wilshaw, 2013.para.28). Whilst his comment is not in itself racist, it is emblematic of the kind of racism that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, in which cultural dominance was asserted amongst the majority population (i.e. White people) as a basis of privileging their views, needs and assumptions over minority groups (Barker, 1981; Gillborn, 2003). For example, Wilshaw's comment gives rise to the view that solving the problem begins with, and should be measured by, the progress made with addressing the attainment of so-called 'White Working Class' children for no other reason than they are in the majority, so their needs should be met first. Some may reject this argument and suggest that Michael Wilshaw is simply observing that the majority



of those that are from disadvantaged backgrounds are White so, statistically, tackling this issue revolves around their attainment. However, by linking disadvantage to race, he invites the recipient to at least consider the former rather than the latter argument.

What is also evident from the data is that it gives rise to the view that economic disadvantage is being used as a means to prioritise the attainment of White children. For example, in one of the extracts above David Laws (MoS) argued that one of the factors that impact on White children's attainment (high or low) is their economic position. This statement is not in itself significant (particularly given that deprivation is a critical factor), but if one examines other evidence in this area alongside this, a more complete argument begins to emerge. For example, in the data above the term 'White Working Class' is arguably used as reference to an ethnic group, when it is not. It describes, inaccurately, a specific group of White children based on their ethnicity and economic background. Yet, comparisons are sometimes made between White Working Class children and other ethnic groups whilst disregarding the economic background of the comparative group. For example, the performance of White British children eligible for FSM is, on occasions, compared with another ethnic group without also taking into consideration the performance of that group's eligibility for FSM, which also has an impact on their attainment. This, arguably, allowed for discussion and debate to be focused on all White children at the expense of other ethnic groups who may equally require government attention. In one of the extracts above, for example, David Ward compared the so-called White Working Class to Pakistani and Bangladeshi children without referencing the poverty experienced by those communities.

It is also arguably the case that this process, in which the interests of so-called 'White Working Class' children are amplified by their White middle class counterparts, is consistent with the behaviour of a society predicated on the conditions of White Supremacy (Allen, 2009). In such a society White people seek to demonstrate an alignment with their less affluent counterparts (ibid). For example, Allen (2009:210) argued that the focus on poor White people shows that they have a bond with their more affluent counterparts, which gives rise to the perception that 'Whites stand up for poor Whites when poor Whites are not

around to represent themselves'. The benefits for the White middle class for doing so are consistent with those I set out earlier in relation to White privilege (ibid). In addition to this, it enables them to judge the privileges they receive, which they consider they are afforded on an individualist basis rather than that they receive them because they belong to the White ethnic group, as confirmation of the existence of an effective meritocracy in society. Therefore, over time, race can be further de-prioritised as a public policy problem (Gillborn, 2010).

The data also gives rise to the view that, whilst the underachievement of Black children was de-prioritised as a public policy problem, race remained a salient issue, but at some point the focus moved from Black children to their so-called 'White Working Class' counterparts. This, according to scholars such as Parker (2003:188), is inevitable when anti-discrimination policies are enacted. He wrote the following with regard to laws in the U.S. but his arguments are applicable here in England, too:

Antidiscrimination law was designed to eliminate individual injustice against minority group members. However, when that injustice was found, the competing interests of white European Americans must balance it.

This is an issue recognised by several CRT scholars who contended that this focus was a deliberate attempt to divert attention away from issues of race in education:

[R]ace, a social construct with powerful social and political implications, has been muted in the current multicultural paradigm or pitted against other subjectivities - particularly class and gender-to render it "un-dis-cussable" as a difference or a site of struggle (Ladson-Billings, 1996:249).

[E]ducation policy discourse in England (in politics and the media) is currently dominated by a concern with social class inequalities and, in particular, the position of White working class students. This focus operates to remove race inequity from the agenda, places White people at the centre of policy debates, and provides the

basis for an analysis that shifts the blame for educational failure onto the very students and communities that experience the injustice (Gillborn et al., 2012:122).

### **Media perception of the White Working Class**

In chapter 3, I argued that the media has played a defining role in framing and mobilising neoliberal policies. The data in this chapter suggests that the promotion of neoliberal policies by the media may have led to 'distorting consequences' (Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2013:590) in the understanding of racial inequality in education. This is also evident in discussions concerned with the attainment of the so-called 'White Working Class'. For example, despite the complexities associated with the way in which the so-called notion of White Working Class is understood, the underachievement of this group has gained traction with the media. In order to substantiate this argument, I want to draw attention to some examples. I have selected this sample through a relatively straightforward examination of articles using the Google search engine and references made to articles in the secondary data (I have dealt with the strengths and limitations of such sampling exercises in the methodology).

The Telegraph published the following extract in an article under the headline 'White working-class boys 'worst performers at school'' (Paton, 2008,para.3-4):

White boys from the most deprived backgrounds are now officially the worst achieving group in England behind children from gypsy families. The disclosure will fuel fears that they are becoming an educational "underclass" - increasingly turning to crime or substance abuse after leaving school with poor qualifications (ibid).

The Spectator published the following extract written by Toby Young, who is a journalist and the co-founder of the West London Free School:

David Cameron (...) wrote an article for the Sunday Times this week in which he drew attention to the under-representation of disadvantaged students in Britain's

universities, which he was quite right to do. But he is wrong about the ethnicity of those students and wrong about where the problem lies. It's working-class white boys who fare the worst, not black boys, and when it comes to broadening access (Young, 2016.para.1)

He went on to argue that, in higher education, White boys are the ones subject to racism:

The Prime Minister talked about 'ingrained, institutional and insidious' attitudes (...) but if he meant racism directed at non-whites, he is mistaken. Inverse racism, whereby academics interviewing applicants from deprived backgrounds are more likely to be favourably disposed towards non-whites than whites, may be closer to the mark (Young, 2016.para.7).

In addition, in 'White boys 'are being left behind' by education system', which was published by the Daily Mail, an unknown local authority officer is quoted as stating the following:

'[W]hite poverty and underachievement aren't as headline-grabbing or sexy" (Mail online, 2007.para.10).

Finally, in The Guardian, Adams wrote the following under the headline 'Number of white working class boys taking AS or A-levels 'shockingly low"' (Adams, 2015.para.1):

White boys from poor families in deprived areas face the double disadvantage of poverty and geography that means they abandon education earlier than their peers in better-off areas, according to new research by Oxford University (ibid)

Several scholars have been critical of media coverage such as this. Reay (2009:22), for example, described it as a 'pervasive moral panic', whilst Gillborn (2009:15) argued that it was shaped by 'ill-informed and inaccurate assumptions that owe more to racist stereotypes than to an understanding of research data'. Indeed, he went on to describe it as 'socially

divisive' (Gillborn, 2009:22). However, these extracts give rise to a number of specific issues that are relevant to this thesis. First, the data suggests that some media organisations perceived the underachievement of Black children to be a government priority and responded with hostility. This kind of aversion to racial progress is not new. Taylor (2016:2), for example, stated the following in his critique of liberalism in the US, but in many ways charts racial developments in the UK too, which makes the argument applicable to this thesis:

Following the remarkable advances of the 1950s and 1960s in dismantling discrimination in schooling, hiring, and housing, there arose a backlash against progressive racial reforms. From the Supreme Court to the lower courts unfolded a general hostility towards policies (such as affirmative action) that took race into account in redressing historic and contemporary racial discrimination.

Bell (2004a) accounted for this in, and considered it a consequence of, the interest convergence principle. He argued that incidents such as this represent the reaction of White people to any advancement in race equality, as they seek to defend their 'superior societal status':

Even when interest convergence results in a potentially effective racial remedy, that remedy will be abrogated as soon as it threatens the superior societal status of whites, particularly those in the middle and upper classes (Bell, 2004a:1059).

Second, the data gives rise to the view that the underachievement of so-called 'White Working Class' children was associated with their ethnicity. Yet, there is evidence to suggest that most economically disadvantaged groups underachieved compared to their counterparts, regardless of their ethnic background (Gillborn, 2009; Strand, 2011, 2012; Ofsted, 2013; Baars et al., 2016; DfE, 2016; Hutchings et al., 2016; Francis and Hutchings, 2017). Therefore, if economic disadvantage was an important factor in educational performance of most children, it is arguably the case that the debate in the media should have centred on this, as opposed to the White Working Class alone. The attention afforded

to White Working Class children being White and British cannot be ignored, as some of these media extracts give rise to the view that White children have in some way been disadvantaged by the prioritisation that may have occurred with regard to the underachievement of some ethnic minority groups. This is evident of the 'we've done enough theory' the CRT scholar Mark Tushnet (1996:767) described. In reference to the civil rights era, he argued that White America was subject to periodic episodes of support for African-American interests, which was motivated by a combination of idealism and self-interest. These episodes of support were, however, superseded by a 'white backlash' (Tillery, 2009: 648) as these very same coalitions then decide that they have done enough and withdraw (Tushnet, 1996). Subsequently, this backlash 'ratchets up pressure on government institutions to return to the status quo' (Tillery, 2009:648).

Third, in explaining the underachievement of the so-called 'White Working Class', sections of the media presented Black children as the 'proverbial scapegoat' (Bell, 1980:767). For example, the article 'Who speaks up for poor white boys' (which one may argue is, by no coincidence, a similar phrase to who is 'speaking up for the white working class?' that was used by David Ward) gives the impression that White people are prohibited from raising concerns about White children because to do so is to be racist. In addition, it reinforces the misconception that the so-called White working class has a form of 'voiceless status' (Bottero, 2009:7) and experience increasing 'social marginalization' (ibid).

This may lead one to arrive at the view that this group is given less priority than ethnic minority groups. This may well be accurate, but what these extracts point to is the perception that White people (in this case the working class) were being disadvantaged by the focus given to other ethnic groups, which in this case was Black children (Gillborn, 2010; Leonardo, 2002). Bell (1992:4) characterised such activity as 'victim-blaming rationalization', whilst Gillborn (2010a:3) referred to this as a 'victim discourse', which involves the presentation of White working class people, and their children in particular, as 'suffering educationally because of minoritised racial groups and their advocates' and Bottero (2009:7) argues that this debate 'pitches the interests of the white working class against those of other ethnic groups and migrant workers'. Furthermore, Leonardo (2002:36) wrote the following:

[W]hite students who feel disadvantaged or victimized by civil rights legislation or racially motivated educational policies (...) perceive themselves as institutionally 'oppressed.' Their understanding of the nature of racial advantage suffers from globalization's ability to fragment further our total understanding of race and racism. The appeal to white disadvantage is 'real' to the extent that whites who believe in their perceived victimization act in a way that is consistent with such a world-view.

Such actions should come as no surprise given that Bell (1992:9) argued that politicians are able to acquire and maintain high office whilst failing to address the inequalities White disadvantage people face because they are able to rely on a 'formula' that calls on the solidarity, patriotism of White people and encouraging them to target their frustrations by opposing any advancement of Black people:

Crucial to this situation is the unstated understanding by the mass of whites that they will accept large disparities in economic opportunity in respect to other whites as long as they have a priority over blacks and other people of color for access to the few opportunities available (ibid).

Yet, Toby Young, and those who assign to victim discourse, fail to recognise the taken for granted nature of the way in which White people have preference over non-Whites (Taylor, 2016). Indeed, '[t]heir political, economic and educational advantages are invisible to them' (Taylor, 2016:4). Furthermore, Bell (1988: 768) wrote the following:

First, whites of widely varying socio-economic status employ white supremacy. (...) Second, even whites who lack wealth and power are sustained in their sense of racial superiority and thus rendered more willing to accept their lesser share by an unspoken but no less certain property right in their 'whiteness'.

Some in the media also rejected the very existence of racial discrimination. For example, in an extract above Toby Young appears to reject the notion that racism exists in education,

unless it is that experienced by White children as a form of what he described as ‘inverse racism’ (Young, 2016.para.7). An assertion such as this is consistent with Whiteness, which states that it is not unusual for some White people to respond to signs of racial progress with either ferocious claims that such developments represent an act of ‘reverse discrimination’ (Freeman, 1995:30), or make attempts to minimise the racist legacy that exists (Leonardo, 2002).

Fourth, it is arguably the case that the attention afforded to the underachievement of the so-called ‘White Working Class’ represented a diversion deployed by their more affluent White counterparts in order to maximise their advantages. Gillborn (2010, 2010a), for example, argued that the existence of poor White people sustains White Supremacy. It is an argument drawn from the CRT scholar Allen (2009) who argued that White people can reject the notion that they are assigned privileges simply for being White because their disadvantaged White counterparts do not share in those privileges. Essentially, they can reject White privilege on the basis that it is not universal.

### **The White Working Class and policy enactment**

Some of the participants suggested that the Coalition government sought to respond to the heightened debate in the media about the attainment of so-called White Working Class children:

*There has been lots of press about White boys. Lots in the press has made the government react to it ( Mr Hammond, CS).*

*I also think this government’s focus has been on white working class boys. I think, really honestly, that has been a politics thing. It appeals to the Tory right. White Working Class boys. I think lots of Liberal Democrat seats have lots of White Working Class boys so it is a problem with which they are familiar (Mrs Watson, CS).*



Mr Hammond (CS) appears to have suggested that this prioritisation had caused schools to react:

*Because of school accountability, when there is a thing about White British boys, they [Headteachers] think, right we must do something about White British boys. Not thinking actually "no we'll sit this one out".*

The Pupil Premium, which can be considered one of the highest profile policies enacted during the Coalition government (and sustained by its successor), appears to have been at least part of that administration's response to this issue. The policy sought to provide 'additional funding for publicly funded schools in England to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the gap between them and their peers' (Parliament. House of Commons, 2014a:27). An initial appraisal of the Pupil Premium may, therefore, lead one to arrive at the conclusion that it is 'ostensibly a more social-democratic form of policy intervention' (Bailey and Ball, 2016:144) than the neoliberal policies of Coalition, but also successive administrations, have enacted (ibid). However, Bailey and Ball (2016:144) argued that the Pupil Premium is in fact consistent with much of the neoliberal agenda, as it is informed by the economy of student worth (Ball, 2012) that I first made reference to in chapter 2 (and will return to on several occasions in this thesis). This is because the economisation of children is ingrained into the conceptual thinking that underpins this policy. For example, in this neoliberal policy regime, the Pupil Premium 'assigns a market value to those students who are less attractive to schools' (ibid), which results in the additional funds representing a form of compensation (because the children eligible may negatively impact on a school's performance), as well as recognition (as this group of children is deemed more expensive to assist in attaining the headline measure). In addition, the Pupil Premium is emblematic of two issues that I referred to earlier: (a) the depoliticisation of problems such as inequality (as the Pupil Premium focused on a technical aspect of inequality) and (b) the shifting of responsibility for inequality onto schools (Goldstein and Woodhouse, 2000; Ball et al., 2012, 2012a; Clarke, 2012; Bailey and Ball, 2016).

With regard to the issue of the so-called White Working class specifically, set out below is an exchange between Alex Cunningham MP, who was at the time a member of the House of Commons Education Committee, and David Laws (MoS) which suggests the Pupil Premium formed part of the Coalition's policy response to this issue:

Schools that have got these underachieving, white working class children need to concentrate those resources in very specific ways, targeted at the individual child. Do you not think that they need some additional resource to reach out into that community? (Alex Cunningham, cited in Parliament. House of Commons, 2014a:27).

They are getting all the additional resources that we have got, which is the pupil premium (David Laws, cited in Parliament. House of Commons, 2014a:27).

The priority afforded to White Working Class children through the Pupil Premium is also evident from this statement made by Christopher Wood, who was at the time Her Majesty's Inspector at Ofsted:

[T]he focus on the performance of pupils eligible for the pupil premium (...) has been strengthened over the last two years (...). Now, there is a much clearer focus on the performance of different groups of pupils who are eligible for free school meals, with white British being a clear focus group that we have identified through our reports and through this year's annual report. It is finding its way into our inspection activities, so schools are much more au fait with talking about those groups of pupils (Cited in Parliament. House of Commons, 2014b:4-5).

There is, however, evidence to suggest that, as opposed to prioritising the White Working Class, successive governments have sought to focus on all economically disadvantaged children. David Laws (MoS), for example, said the following:

The (...) pupil premium is not just that the money is there, but that it is part of a new focus on the most disadvantaged young people and on closing the gap, which means

that schools, since the pupil premium has come in, are much more conscious of the attainment and progress of their most disadvantaged youngsters (Parliament. House of Commons, 2014a:13).

One of the participants appeared to suggest that the focus on all economically disadvantaged children was for political reasons:

*I think the focus on closing the gap is party political. If you say you're closing the gap for the least well off, well it has a lovely ring to it, doesn't it? And it makes logical sense. The middle class also like to think they're doing their bit, or at least verbalising that you care is a nice indulgence around dinner party tables (Mr Sandbrook, AHT).*

As I set out in relation to Aiming High, it is not my intention to evaluate specific government policies, but it is important to point out some of the data that suggests that the Pupil Premium led to heightened activity in schools (such as the allocation of additional resources and increased scrutiny). For example, Ofsted stated the following in its evaluation:

The pupil premium is making a difference in many schools. Overall, school leaders are spending pupil premium funding more effectively, tracking the progress of eligible pupils more closely and reporting outcomes more precisely than before (Ofsted, 2014:4)

However, it also cautioned against arriving at premature judgments:

[I]t takes time to establish whether this increased focus will lead to a narrowing in the attainment gap between those eligible for the pupil premium and other pupils (ibid).

Based exclusively on the data above, it is difficult to substantiate whether the Pupil Premium was indeed enacted to raise the attainment of all economically disadvantaged children, or just those of this group who were White. However, if one considers the very

same evidence in the wider context of the data and scholarly work I have presented in this thesis, it is feasible to argue that the policy was intended to specifically address the underachievement of so-called White Working Class children (as opposed to all disadvantaged groups). For example, the data suggests that the prioritisation of the so-called White Working Class by the Coalition government coincided with the media outcry about this issue, but also the enactment of the Pupil Premium. In addition, the policy was more often associated with White British children than any other group. At the very least the Pupil Premium is, therefore, a classic case of White Privilege. What I mean by this is that, as Leonardo (2016:265) argued, 'white subjects accrue advantages by virtue of being constructed as white'.

However, one of the participants sought to explain the prominence afforded to disadvantaged children, which may offer an alternative explanation:

*I think Free School Meals is almost the same thing as ethnicity, but we don't mind as much because it feels less integral to the identity of the student (Mr Fitzpatrick, AHT & CS).*

Mr Fitzpatrick (AHT & CS) appears to suggest that officials and senior leaders are much more amenable to enacting policies with regard to economic disadvantage as opposed to race. One may debate, as I have, whether this amenability also extends to White children, or indeed that it is not the focus on economic disadvantage that makes officials and senior leaders more responsive, but the very obvious ability of such policies to advance the interest of White British children, even if they are presented otherwise. It is arguably the case, therefore, that this statement acts as further evidence in support of the view that politicians, officials and senior leaders are reluctant to recognise and discuss issues of race, as well as an illustration of the dominance of the colour-blind approach in the education system. In addition, it also gives rise to important questions with regard to the circumstances in which racial progress in policy is realised (in particular the interest convergence principle). If, for example, one compares the enactment of Aiming High with the Pupil Premium as policy responses to issues of race and attainment, notwithstanding that they were introduced by two different administrations, the data suggests that the latter was treated with a greater

degree of seriousness. For example, it had much more robust accountability arrangements as Ofsted took account of White children's attainment and schools' spending of the Pupil Premium in its inspections, it had greater profile in government and schools and, crucially, officials and senior leaders were more likely to respond to the policy in a positive way. As I set out earlier, these arrangements were not evident in the enactment of Aiming High.

Yet, what is also interesting is that, despite the Pupil Premium being specifically targeted at the so-called White Working Class, it may be the case that a disproportionate number of Black children benefitted from this policy. John Nash (PUSoS), for example, said the following:

Black pupils have for several years been the lowest-performing ethnic group in England's schools - but Department for Education statistics show that since 2010 the gap between their results and other pupils' has narrowed (...). The reforms which have contributed to the turnaround include: (...) bringing in the pupil premium, which gives schools extra money to improve the performance of their poorest pupils (Cited in DfE, 2014b.para.3-4).

If one applies the notion of interest convergence, it is possible to explain how and why this may be the case. As CRT scholars have argued, the educational progress of Black children has only been secured if it is perceived by White people to be in their interest or almost/entirely cost-free (Bell, 1980; Taylor, 2016:6). The Pupil Premium and the prioritisation of White British, economically disadvantaged children may be an example of this, given that this policy was targeted at this group even though the resources and associated requirements were aimed at all children that fell into this category. It is arguably the case, therefore, that the economic circumstances of many Black children who are, for example, more likely to be eligible for FSM than most large ethnic groups (Parliament. House of Commons, 2014) and in lower paid employment (see, for example, figure 6) (Simpson et al., 2006; Strand, 2011; Corlett, 2017) may mean that the schools they attend received more funding from the Pupil Premium than other schools.

There is also evidence to suggest that the attainment of disadvantaged children in London, where a large proportion of Black children are educated, increased significantly (Greaves et al., 2014; Perera et al., 2016; Andrews et al., 2017). This may not necessarily be attributable to the Pupil Premium in particular (DfE, 2017e), but it may be possible to argue that the focus and resources successive governments have afforded to this problem, motivated by the imperative to address concerns about the attainment of the so-called White Working Class has contributed. Consequently, whilst the prioritisation of the underachievement of disadvantaged children was not intended to assist Black children, they may have benefited all the same.

**Figure 6: Median incomes in the UK: average over (2016-17 prices), 2013-14 and 2015-16**



\*Categories are based on very small sample sizes

\*\*The 'White - Irish' category is only available in England, Scotland and Wales.

**Source: Resolution Foundation, Corlett (2017)**

If this is the case in this instance, one is right to question whether this is also possible on a much larger scale elsewhere in the enactment of education policy. The data suggests it is indeed the case.

### **Ethnicity, education & government policy**

Prior to setting out this data, I want to summarise the evidence so far and draw together the conclusions I have begun to arrive at. First, as a number of scholars have argued (some of whom I drew attention to in chapter 2), there is no single, homogeneous way of defining underachievement. This brings into question whether governments were in a position to tackle underachievement if the concept in itself was not widely understood. In addition, it appears that this uncertainty allowed schools to claim that Black children were performing at a higher level than they were.

Second, at some point during the period of time this thesis is concerned with Black children, White British children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and children eligible for FSM were prioritised by one or more administrations because they were deemed to be underachieving. It is possible that New Labour prioritised Black children's underachievement, but this status was symbolic and ephemeral. For example, it appears that officials and senior leaders were reticent to discuss issues of race and attainment (unless it was in relation to the so-called White Working Class). As a result, the policy response to this issue (at a national and school level) was either symbolic or non-existent. Aiming High, for instance, represented the most significant action New Labour took to address this problem in the aftermath of the Stephen Lawrence case. Yet, the policy lacked the political profile and accountability mechanisms to have a significant impact. Indeed, if one compares it to the Pupil Premium, it is arguably the case that the timid and symbolic nature of the Aiming High policy was intentional.

Third, it is possible to conclude that the 'superior societal status' (Bell, 1980:523) that White people hold was reinforced by the conceptualisation of the so-called White Working Class as an underachieving ethnic group and the policy enactment it precipitated. For example,

Gillborn et al., (2016:4) argued that there has been a ‘fundamental misreading of data’ (i.e. that of a minority of White children eligible for FSM) to ‘fuel a belief in widespread White failure per se’. In addition to this, there were fundamental flaws in the way in which White Working Class was conceptualised and used in public policy discourse (i.e. this cohort was often deemed a racial group in and of itself). As I explained earlier, economic circumstances of White children were taken into consideration in the conceptualisation of this group (i.e. the children identified as being White Working Class were indeed White, but they were also economically disadvantaged). References were then made to this group (by some of the participants, but also some journalists and politicians) as if it was a specific ethnic category void of this crucial economic factor that had been taken into consideration. Indeed, their educational attainment was often compared to other racial groups in which no such consideration of their economic circumstances were made. I want to offer a further example in order to illustrate this point. Freeman (2017:para.1) wrote the following under the headline ‘Factors behind attainment gap of BAME children’:

On relative levels of achievement, it has been known for decades that there is a hierarchy of achievement with Chinese children at the top and white working class boys and black African-Caribbean children at the bottom (Freeman, 2017:para.4).

Moreover, those who sought to advance and legitimise the existence of this group seldom mentioned the flaws in this conceptualisation of race. One may even go as far as to argue that some actors deliberately ignored these flaws in order to advance their argument, which was that White people were the ‘new race victims’ (Gillborn, 2009:22). This is important because it is arguable that the formation of the so-called White Working Class as an ethnic group in and of itself, appears to have had a significant impact on the way in which race was considered in the education system. For example, the data suggests that the attainment of the so-called White Working Class became a salient issue (superseding the longstanding problem of Black children underachieving) and was awarded considerable attention in the media (some of which even seemed to blame the limited prioritisation of Black children as the cause of White Working Class children's underachievement being ignored by successive governments). Subsequently, several policies were enacted by the Coalition in order to



address the concern of the White middle class. These policies, such as the Pupil Premium, were afforded a higher profile and accountability arrangements than those targeted at addressing the underachievement of Black children (i.e. Aiming High).

However, despite this it is possible that the Pupil Premium may have benefitted Black children because of the way in which the policy was constructed. As a result, it raises important questions about the conditions that lead to Black children benefiting from education policy. It is to those conditions that I wish to turn for the remainder of this chapter, but it is arguably the case that the data set out in this chapter so far is evidence of institutional racism at a societal level, or what CRT scholars describe as White Supremacy.

### **Black children and prioritising London**

As I explained in the introduction, this thesis is concerned with the attainment of Black children in London. I chose to focus on this geographical area for several methodological reasons. However, I also took this decision because of the high level of policy activity that appears to have taken place in London during the timeframe this thesis is concerned with and the impact this may have had on the education of Black children.

I began, therefore, by seeking to establish whether, in their efforts to raise standards, successive governments made London a priority for education policy. One of the participants claimed it had:

*I think London has had more attention. It got money, programmes like Teach First<sup>22</sup> and Future Leaders<sup>23</sup> started in London (...). We didn't have that in [names the town in the north of England he used to work in] (Mr Sandbrook, AHT).*

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<sup>22</sup> Teach First is an accelerated graduate programme that trains and supports professionals to become teachers in schools in challenging circumstances (often in terms of performance).

<sup>23</sup> Future Leaders is an intensive leadership development training programme for teachers wishing to progress onto become a headteacher.

This view appears to have been held by several politicians too. Michael Gove (SoS), for example, stated the following:

What's really made the difference is that London has been the laboratory for educational reform over the past decade (Gove, 2012.para.19).

Whilst Graham Stuart (Ch.HoCEC), who was Chairmen of the House of Commons Education Committee put forward a similar view:

One of the characteristics of London is that it has been put under the spotlight. It has had a lot of support, including financial (Cited in Parliament. House of Commons, 2014a:2).

Mike Tomlinson, who was Chief Adviser for London Schools (CALs), claimed that London only became a priority for New Labour during its second term in office:

By 1997, the poor performance of London's schools had been recognised for some time and had been well documented in the press (...) But it was not until 2003 that the London Challenge was launched (Tomlinson, 2013.para.1-2).

Tim Brighouse, who was Chief Adviser for London Schools (CALs) between 2002-2007 and led London Challenge, offered an alternative perspective:

[T]he new government had more than enough (...). They did not spend time concerning themselves with things they did not recognise as pressing priorities. Both urban education and the shape of London's schools fell into that category (Brighouse, 2007:72-73).

Overall, this data suggests that London was a priority for successive governments and, following sustained government intervention, became a high performing region. This is substantiated by a number of reports into education in London (see, for example, Ofsted,

2010; Wyness, 2011; Hutchings et al, 2012; Blanden et al., 2015). In terms of policy enactment, for example, Fullan and Boyle (2014:110) described London Challenge as ‘possibly the most unlikely systemwide endeavor ever attempted’. In addition, Blanden et al. (2015) argued that a significant amount of London’s educational success can be attributed to policy enactment in the capital over the past fifteen years.

A brief review of education policy since New Labour was elected adds further weight to this argument. For example, in addition to the enactment of London Challenge under New Labour and then its partial expansion (i.e. Academies, Teach First and the wider standards agenda), under the Coalition and Conservative governments, London benefited from, Excellence in Cities and the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies (Machin and McNally, 2008; Blanden et al., 2015). These policies began with a disproportionate number of schools situated in London (ibid). Indeed, prior to these policies being enacted New Labour had already intervened in five priority boroughs and privatised some aspects of their operations (DfE, 2003a; Fullan, and Boyle, 2014). In addition, prior to the launch of London Challenge, Stephen Twigg (MoS), a junior Minister in the DfE in the New Labour government was appointed the Minister for London Schools, which was crucial to the enactment and success of London Challenge and political leadership more broadly (Fullan and Boyle, 2014).

The data primarily suggests that during the period in which London was prioritised attainment in the region improved. This was a view advanced by some of the participants:

*London is infinitely more successful in any way. If you want to look at it in terms of results and gaps or the quality of teaching and the number of schools that are good an outstanding, London is an infinitely better place at education than when I went to school (Mr Fitzpatrick, AHT & CS).*

*A consultant I used to work with described his work in these areas as grabbing low hanging fruit. (...) Basic expectations were being taught [to teachers], such as there should be a starter for every lesson (Mr Connelly, HT).*

This view was also shared by some politicians. For example, Boris Johnson, who was Mayor of London between 2008 and 2016, wrote the following:

Children in the capital are more likely to excel than anywhere else in the country  
(Cited in Greater London Authority, 2013: 1).

Michael Gove (SoS) made similar remarks:

In the seventies and eighties inner London schools were seen by many as a by-word for failure (...). But over the last few decades there has been a transformation  
(Michael Gove, 2012.para.11-12).

Indeed, he went on to claim that London inspired his thinking as he enacted reforms as Secretary of State for Education:

While I've been inspired by Singapore, Finland and New Orleans another success story has perhaps had an even greater influence on my thinking. And it's one that's closer to home. London (Gove, 2012.para.10).

In addition, Michael Wilshaw (HMCI) put forward the following argument:

The distribution of underachievement has shifted. Twenty or 30 years ago, the problems were in urban areas. Inner London schools were the best funded and worst achieving in the country. Now, schools in inner and outer London are the best performing (Wilshaw, 2013.para.42).

What improvement we have seen in secondary schools has been disproportionately driven by schools in some parts of England, particularly London, and not others  
(Wilshaw, 2016a.para.29).

However, the evaluation carried out by Ofsted (2010) appears to be consistent with the assertions presented in the secondary data:

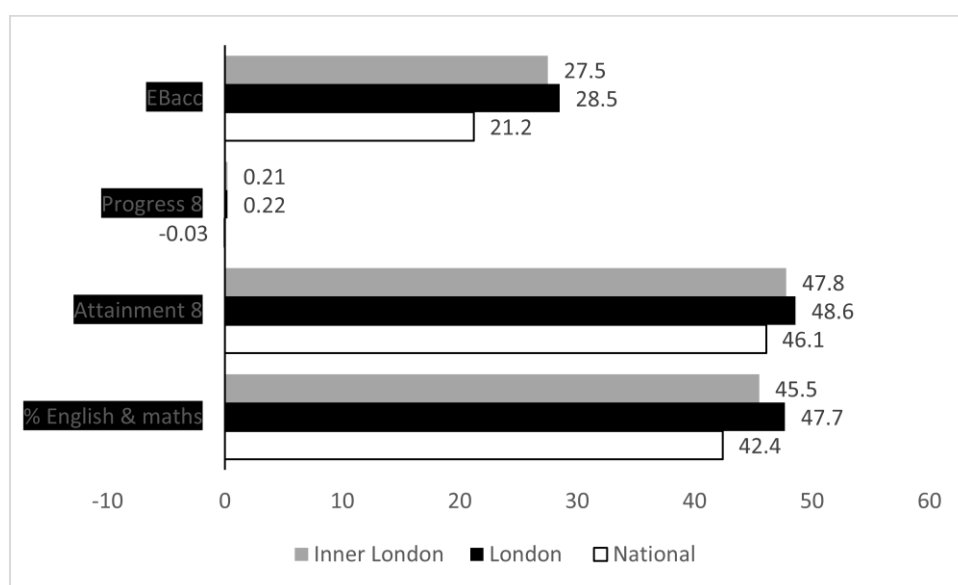
London secondary schools have continued to improve and the average attainment of pupils in London secondary schools is above the national average (Ofsted, 2010:4).

There is also research which substantiates that London had become high performing region and then maintained that status throughout the period this thesis is concerned with (Baars et al., 2014; Greaves et al., 2014; Perera et al., 2016; Andrews et al., 2017; Andrews et al., 2017a; DfE, 2017g; Social Mobility Commission, 2017; Tinson et al., 2017). This is what was often described as the 'London Effect' (Greaves et al., 2014:7). Perera et al., (2016), for example, found that in the past decade improvements in the percentage of children achieving the headline measure were higher in London than any other region (they increased by two-thirds of a grade on average across all GCSE entries). Furthermore, the Social Market Foundation (2016) found that for 11-year olds born in 2000, the geographic area they came from become a more powerful predictive factor of educational performance than those born in 1970. This pattern remains the same following the introduction of the new headline measure (DfE, 2017g). Nick Clegg (DPM) said the following in relation this disparity in performance:

What is now becoming clear is that inequality in education comes in many shapes and sizes. It is not just the relative wealth (...) it is postcode inequality too. What part of the country a child grows up in has a real impact on their life chances (Clegg, 2016.para.31-33).

See Figure 7 for further evidence.

**Figure 7: New Headline performance measures, 2017: national and region data (provisional)**



Source: DfE, 2017i

Explaining why attainment in London has improved is subject to debate (see, for example, Baars et al., 2014; Burgess, 2014; Greaves, et al., 2014; Blanden et al., 2015). Some of the participants credited policies such as London Challenge with realising this improvement:

*London Challenge was a major policy, in so much as this was seen as a model all school should do in London to improve the educational outcomes of young people (Mr Fitzpatrick, AHT & CS).*

*Everyone is intrigued about London Challenge. Even the reports that have come out recently can't agree, so there is a lot of interest in the Department about why it worked or why it didn't (Mrs Watson, CS).*

Several Ministers and officials also credited London Challenge with realising improvements: For example, Andrew Adonis (PUSoS), who undertook amongst other roles Minister for London Schools in the New Labour government, stated the following:

Since its inception in 2003, London Challenge has helped bring about a step-change in the quality of London schools (Adonis, cited in DfES, 2005a:1).

In essence the London Challenge involved an exercise in bringing about change for the better in a very loosely organised schooling system (Tim Brighouse (CALs) in Brighouse, 2015:5).

The London Challenge model and legacy lives on. Education in London has been transformed over the last 15 to 20 years (Nicky Morgan (SoS) in Morgan, 2015a.para.23).

Michael Gove (SoS) credited London Challenge, which was a neoliberal solution to underachievement in London, with informing policy enactment by the Coalition:

The last Government launched the London Challenge in 2003. There were several elements to this but the three most important were Sponsored Academies; the use of outstanding schools to mentor others; [and] a focus on improving the quality of teaching - especially through Teach First. Each of these strands has had a profound effect on performance and on my thinking (Gove, 2012.para.20-22).

Some Ministers in the Coalition and Conservative governments singled out the academies programme for particular attention. Michael Gove (SoS), for instance, said the following when explaining the success in London:

The sponsored academy revolution began in London. Until 2010 there were more in London than the rest of the country put together - and there are still more than in any other region (Gove, 2012.para.23).

Nicky Morgan (SoS) also pointed to academies as a part of the explanation:

Schools across London prove that there is no place for the old excuses about ‘kids like these’ (...). London’s academies and chains of schools demonstrate this transformative power of this approach in everything they do (Morgan, 2015a.para.18-20).

The data appears to confirm that London Challenge was part of New Labour’s wider neoliberal agenda. For example, in the preface to a London Challenge document Tony Blair wrote the following:

Piecemeal change is not enough to build a first-class education system for London. Radical structural reform is essential, not only to raise standards in existing schools, but to reshape the system around diversity, choice and the new specialist principle (Cited in DfES, 2003a:2)

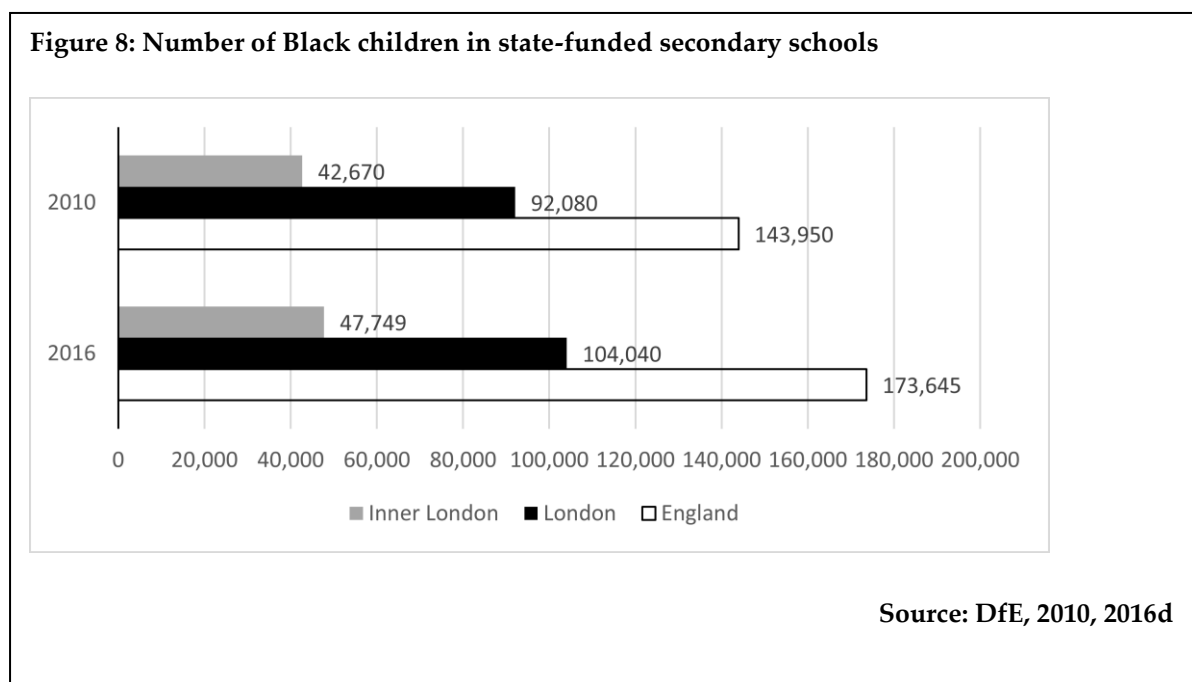
Andrew Adonis (PUSoS) stated the following:

We want to free schools to innovate, taking advantage of the nationwide deregulation of the system and new legislative freedoms (...) As part of this new, more diverse and innovative system, we want to see greater innovation in the provision of schools. New academies across London will be an important part of that (DfES, 2003a:12-13).

The data in this section, as well as the existing research, which associates educational attainment with location raises important questions with regard to race. What I mean by this is that it may also be possible to argue that the improvements in Black children’s attainment that took place in London are attributable, in part at least, to the London Effect. For instance, if as Michael Wilshaw (HMCI) (2016) argued, the improvement in attainment in London made a disproportionately higher contribution to the overall improvement experienced in England for all children, this may also be the case with regard to specific racial groups. Indeed, recent data shows that, for example, the educational performance of all major ethnic groups in inner London improved at a greater rate than other regions between 2005 and



2013 (McAleavy and Elwick, 2016) and that, on average, a child in inner London from any ethnic background would have performed worse than one elsewhere in the country in 2006 but in 2013 would perform better (ibid). This suggests that the London Effect is significant in terms of race, but more so for Black children given that they reside in London in large numbers. In 2003, for example, it was estimated that over sixty percent of all Black people live in London (Bhattacharyya et al., 2003), which suggests that a similar percentage are educated in the region. This is support by more recent data, which I have set out below (see Figure 8).



One should also take into consideration the composition of all children educated in London. For example, whilst in 2015 Black children made up just under six percent of the school population in England (which means the  $\text{GCSE}$  attainment could have less of an impact on the national headline measure), they made up 28 percent of those in inner London (DfE, 2015b). If one takes Lambeth as a specific example, since 1990 the composition of the White British school population has declined from 34% in 1991 to 15% in 2014 (thus no longer represents the largest group) but, whilst the proportion of Black Caribbean children has also declined by 11 percentage points, the Black African cohort has increased by 13% since 1991 and now form the largest group (Demie and McLean, 2015). It is possible,

therefore, that the regional impact on Black children's attainment in particular was profound. Consequently, the London Effect in this regard (i.e. a large proportion of Black children benefited from being educated in the highest performing region in the country) must be given serious consideration in any attempt to assess the impact of government policy on this group and explain why it increased.

The significance of this should not be underestimated. As I set out in the introduction, one of the aims of this thesis is to explain why the attainment of Black children has increased if the education system is institutionally racist and, as a result, successive governments have deemed the underachievement of Black children to be a low priority.

It is arguably the case that the data set out above demonstrates that the improvements in Black children's attainment derived from policies that were meaningful and sustained in a geographical area where they could have an impact on a significant proportion of that population.

Yet, determining whether the interest convergence principle can account for this remains unsubstantiated. In order to do so, in addition to demonstrating that the prioritisation of London and the policies per se improved the attainment of Black children, one would have to establish that they were (a) enacted with the intention of addressing the needs of White people as opposed to their Black counterparts, despite claims to the contrary or (b) accommodated even though they improved the attainment of Black children because their success was deemed to advance the interests of White people or do them no harm. It is, however, too early to make such an assertion, but the data suggests that the prioritisation of London and the subsequent improvement in Black children's attainment means that such a conclusion can be reached. In the remaining sections of this thesis, I will set out the data that appears to substantiate this view.

## London and the attainment gap

As I discussed above, establishing the existence of the interest convergence principle in this case requires, in part at least, evidence which suggests that the high level of policy activity in London and the policies themselves were intended to address the needs of White people as opposed to their Black counterparts, despite claims to the contrary. There is, however, data which suggest that the prioritisation of London was intended to address issues of racial inequality. Mr Dyce (CS), for example, said the following:

*It was actually given that it [gaps in attainment by ethnicity] was on the agenda as part of London Challenge. If you look at where the gaps were between certain groups and their peers, they were extremely wide. Enforcing schools to examine the data, questioning why certain groups were underperforming (...). Getting schools to look forensically at their data, not just at pupil level but group level, was absolutely critical.*

Mike Tomlinson (CALs) appears to have shared this view:

By 1997, the poor performance of London's schools had been recognised for some time and had been well documented in the press. Only 16% of students gained five GCSEs at grades A to C, and large gaps in the achievements of different ethnic groups were a major issue for many communities (Tomlinson, 2003.para.1).

In addition, a number of references and policy commitments were also made to educational inequality in the London Challenge policy document introducing the programme:

The success of the London Challenge depends on ensuring that every group in London begins to achieve (...). Only when, for example, white working class and Black Caribbean pupils achieve well, can the London Challenge be said to have succeeded (DfES, 2003: 26).

A key test of the London Challenge's effectiveness will be its success in raising the attainment of those who achieve least at present, including those from some minority ethnic groups and the white working class (DfES, 2003: 27).

The London Challenge will (...) [be] piloting new Key Stage 3 materials and approaches to raise the achievement of African-Caribbean boys (DfES, 2003: 27).

New Labour also stated in its Aiming High consultation that raising the attainment of ethnic minority children in London would be a priority:

High expectations in London schools will also be an important feature of our Forthcoming strategy to improve the achievement of all pupils in the capital. In each of these strands, we will particularly seek to raise achievement of pupils from minority ethnic groups (DfES, 2003: 23).

This data suggests that the underachievement of Black children was an important part of the New Labour policy agenda for London. Indeed, Mr Dyce (CS) appears to have claimed that recognising diversity is a prerequisite for enacting policy in the capital:

*You cannot operate in London without recognising diversity. Two thirds of pupils in inner London school are not White, half in greater [London] (Mr Dyce, CS).*

Yet, in a critique of some of the policies enacted by schools involved in London Challenge, Mr Dyce (CS) said the following:

*Schools were looking at data, such as forty-five percent of their children getting five A to Cs. They did not look at who the 45% of pupils were.*

The Coalition government also spoke of these policies being important to addressing gaps in attainment. Michael Gove (SoS), for example, wrote the following:

Since this government came to power we have seen the achievements of black and minority ethnic children improve. We have seen more schools than ever before - with more freedoms than ever before - transform the lives of more BME children than ever before - by giving them the sort of opportunities which were once restricted to a privileged few (Gove, 2013.para.96-99).

In this speech he referred to several academies and academy providers operating in London. He went on to say the following, too:

That is why it is so welcome that the Mayor of London is not just driving up standards for BME children (...) - but also helping us to establish new free schools in areas of deprivation and disadvantage (Gove, 2013.para.102).

If one considers this data in isolation, it suggests that successive governments prioritised London and enacted policies such as academies with the explicit intention of raising the attainment of Black children. Indeed, as Christy Kulz (2014:187) argued, Academies were set up in poor areas populated by ethnic minorities to break cyclical underachievement through 'establishing a culture of ambition'. Yet, in one of the extracts above Mr Dyce stated that schools involved with London Challenge were concerned with raising standards, but not necessarily with addressing racial inequality. Whilst this represents a single counter claim to the rest of the data, set out earlier in this chapter were observations made by participants who also suggested that race was not a priority. Taken together, this data potentially raises pertinent issues with regard to the focus afforded to addressing the underachievement of Black children in London when it was prioritised and these policies were enacted. At best, it is further evidence of the dominance of the colour-blind approach I made reference to earlier (i.e. policy was enacted using the principle of the non-recognition of race). Alternatively, it makes it feasible to question whether in this case, as the interest convergence principle affords one to contend, the interest of Black children was not the motivating factor even though it advanced their interest. Indeed, one of the basic insights of the interest convergence principle is that activity that advances the interests of Black people (such as the enactment of public policy) cannot be considered in isolation. Driver (2011:157), for example,

argued that interest convergence has taught us that ‘domestic events cannot be viewed in utter isolation from the surrounding international context’, but it is arguably the case that this also applies to local circumstances. Some of the data in this chapter suggests that London was prioritised by successive governments in order to address issues of race, but other aspects give rise to the view that there were ulterior motives. I now want to explore this in more detail.

### **Why London?**

Some of the participants claimed that the poor standard of education, and the impact this was having on the nation’s reputation, were factors in the enactment of policy in London:

*London Challenge was the Secretary of State saying that education in London is just not good enough and the standards are just nowhere near where they need to be (Mr Fitzpatrick, AHT & CS).*

*London Challenge was selected because the schools were not as good as they could have been (Mr Hammond, CS).*

*Why London Challenge started in London? The data told us to locate it there (Mr Carmichael, CS).*

*The focus at the time was that the [standard of education] was a national disgrace (Mrs Watson, CS).*

There were similar arguments presented by Ministers and other officials. For example, Charles Clarke (SoS), who was Secretary of State at the DfE at the launch of London Challenge claimed that London was a priority because of poor schools:

[T]here are still far too many schools which are failing to inspire and lead their communities and far too many areas where educational aspirations are low.

Jon Coles (DLC), who was Director of London Challenge, wrote the following:

On a range of measures, London schools were indeed doing worse than those elsewhere. (...); there were proportionately more schools below government targets than anywhere else (Coles, 2015:11).

Stephen Twigg (MoS) pointed to a number of factors:

Clearly there's a social and economic context to that (...) such as extremes of wealth and poverty next to each other, a much higher proportion of parents in London sending their children to independent schools; elements of selective education still in parts of London or bordering London (Cited in Smither, 2002,para.7).

The concerns raised by parents about the standard of London schools, as well as the availability of good school places, was also referenced. For example, one of the participants said the following:

*The number of parents who choose to send their children to private school, I suppose that was another London factor (Mrs Watson, CS).*

Tim Brighouse (CALs) wrote the following in similar regard:

[In a] [c]onversation with Estelle Morris in December 2003 when she confided that one of the clinching arguments for launching the London Challenge was confusion between 13 and 30 as percentages of parents who sent their children to private schools (Brighouse, 2007:93).

In addition, Jon Coles (DLC) appears to have shared this view when he wrote the following:

If families in the top quintile of the income distribution are disproportionately likely to opt out of public services to use private schools (...) the 'middle class comprehensive' seen in most other cities was largely absent there – reducing further the likelihood of some wealthier families choosing the state system (Coles, 2015:11).

Some political leaders appear to have also arrived at the same view. For example, Tony Blair (PM) wrote the following in the preface of the first London Challenge policy document:

No parent or child should be left without a choice of good primary or secondary school (Cited in DfES, 2003a:2).

Other Ministers stated that the number of parents sending their children to private school was a specific problem:

We have to ask why it is that so many families in London are choosing to send their kids to independent schools (Stephen Twigg, cited in Smithers, 2002.para.12).

Too many parents are anguished and fearful, rather than proud or confident, when choosing their child's secondary school. And there are far too many who feel that either expensive private education or lengthy journeys across the city from home to school are the only satisfactory answer (Charles Clarke (SoS), cited in DfES, 2003a:4).

Further to this, the executive summary of the London Challenge policy document stated the following:

In London, the choice is often resolved by going private, moving house or criss-crossing London on hour long journeys. For those who live in areas with several inadequate local schools, the choice is especially painful (DfES, 2003a:6).

There were also references to the lack of confidence in schools undermining the whole system of education in London:



Lack of parental confidence in schools may reflect historically low exam performance and the weakness of the LEA. But this lack of confidence can also make it harder for schools to improve and influences how the whole London education system is regarded (DfE, 2003a:20).

Indeed, these concerns were epitomised by the infamous criticisms made by a leading Conservative MP. In 2003, Oliver Letwin (then Shadow Home Secretary) was cited as stating that he would 'rather beg' (Hall, 2003.para.1) than send his children to a state school:

In Lambeth where I live, I would give my right arm to send them to a fee-paying school. If necessary I would go out on the streets and beg rather than send them to a school next to where I live (cited in Hall, 2003. para.9).

The data suggest this issue was not only salient amongst New Labour politicians, but their successors in government both regionally and nationally. For example, the following was stated in a Mayor of London report:

Even in those areas where there may be a surplus of places, some London parents feel they do not have a genuine choice and are unsatisfied with the schools in their local area (Mayor of London, 2014:56).

The issue of school standards and school places was also conflated. For example, Boris Johnson (MoL), stated the following:

We need a Commissioner with the powers and oversight to ensure there will be enough schools places for our growing population and that pupils will have access to the rigorous, high quality education that they deserve wherever they live in the capital (Cited in Mayor of London, 2015a.para.5).

This data suggests there were a range of factors that played a role in the heightened focus London was afforded. They include the high levels of inequalities in attainment (including in relation to ethnicity and deprivation), the standard of schools and low attainment, the damage to the UK's reputation of having poor schools in its capital city, the concerns raised by parents about the accessibility to good schools. Yet, some of the data suggests that it was the concerns of all parents that New Labour was responding to when it chose to prioritise London. Certainly, the extracts set out above from New Labour Ministers and the London Challenge policy document suggests this.

Some of the data, however, points to the contrary. It gives rise to the view that the outcry New Labour was responding to was from parents of a particular demographic. For example, Mrs Watson claimed that parents choosing to send their children to private school was a factor in explaining why London was prioritised. In addition, in one of the extracts above Charles Clarke (SoS) stated that parents were optioning for private schools are making lengthy journeys across London in order to find a good school. There are further references to this in other accounts set out above too. Butler and Hamnett (2011:36) described this process as 'strategising'. This refers to a process in which parents identify pathways into the high achieving schools (in the state, private or faith sectors) and invest considerable amounts of time and economic, cultural and emotional capital in order to realise the outcome they seek. Indeed, Oliver Letwin's emotive comment above epitomised the concern amongst the middle class about the quality of education in London and the sensitivities the Conservative party recognised whilst being the Opposition. Therefore, given that for economic reasons it is unlikely working class (and even some lower middle class) families would have had the option to send their children to private school, or move into expensive, desirable areas where schools were perceived and/or judged to be high performing, it is arguably the case that successive governments prioritised London in response to the concerns of middle class parents.

Neoliberalism and CRT are pivotal in explaining this finding. First, returning to the centrality of individualism that is at the centre of the neoliberal ideology, it appears that this process of thought may have informed the decisions taken by middle class parents, who are

considered by advocates of neoliberals (such as New Labour) to be consumers in the quasi school market (Friedman, 1951; Ball, 2006b; Jones, 2014). It appears that New Labour intervened in the market to protect the interests of the White middle class. In addition, research informed by interest convergence has established that White parents play an extremely pivotal role in the advancement of policy that works to the advantage of Black children. Whilst I recognise that the work by Garda (2011:610) was concerned with education in the US, he argued that interest-convergence theory explains why the establishment and endurance of racially integrated schools in the US is unlikely unless white parents believe it to be in their children's best interest:

As history shows, the job of integrating the nation's schools simply cannot be accomplished without white parents' participation and support, which will not be given unless they know it will benefit their children.

There is also data that suggests that the role of politicians and the media raising concerns was another factor. For example, one of the participants said the following:

*I think there was a sense schools had descended into a spiral, but also some parents getting really cross about it. So there were lots of MPs getting lobbied about their schools, but also Parliament is based in London so more MPs visited London schools than they did other areas (Mrs Watson, CS).*

Other officials also referred to the influence of politicians and the media:

Headlines had been generated repeatedly by the decisions of senior London-based figures in the government to send their children to private schools, grammar schools or other schools far from home in preference to local state secondary schools. These headlines resonated naturally with a national view that London schools were particularly poor. And this perception was easily reinforced by a largely London-based media (Jon Coles (DLC) in Coles, 2015:11).

[P]arental choice for children's secondary school, which had always been a vexatious issue in metropolitan areas, had become politically embarrassing in London (...). The attention given to the issue was doubtless the greater because almost all MPs have residences in London as do many journalists and broadcasters. What are widely dubbed the 'chattering classes' were prone to regale each other over the dinner table with tales of school failure or success and their relief or concern that their offspring attend a 'good school' (Tim Brighouse (CALS) in Brighouse, 2007:74).

Indeed, Tim Brighouse (CALS) claimed that parents choosing to opt for private schools were a key factor, but that this was exacerbated by the concerns raised by politicians and the media:

This factor tipped ministerial thinking, which was already concerned that there seemed to be a general consensus among politicians and journalists that London schools, particularly secondary schools, were places to be avoided if you wanted a good education for your children (Brighouse, 2007:5).

This data gives rise to the view that the media played a significant role in amplifying the concerns of parents.

There were also references in the data to economic and workforce considerations which I have not set out in this thesis, but warrant, in a more expansive piece of research, consideration (particularly with regard to the heightened concern about immigration which existed at the time). I, however, want to focus on the factors that have emerged or significantly changed during the period of time this thesis is concerned with. What I mean by this is that many of the factors the data refers to are longstanding-issues in London (Gray and Whitty, 2007). For example, in one of the extracts above, Mike Tomlinson claimed that the poor standard of schools in London was a long-standing issue and Tim Brighouse (CALS) argued that the concerns of parents about the standards of schools in London existed for some time prior to New Labour taking office. These arguments are consistent with the scholarly work of Gray and Whitty (2007) who claimed that the size and

disproportionate number of schools in London, the focus on deprivation and inequality and the fact Parliament is based in London, resulting in education policy being London-centric are long standing issues. Yet, when New Labour came to power in 1997 it had no specific education policy for London and it did not form part of the seventeen priorities it had for education (Brighouse, 2007). Therefore, it is arguably the case that any explanation that accounts for London being prioritised in the period this thesis is concerned with must take into account that the issues set out above were long-standing and, as a result, must explain what changed in order to initiate government action.

There are, however, those who would seek to question this conclusion. For example, Litowitz (1997) argued that CRT scholars refuse to specify the evidence that could be used to refute claims of interest convergence. As I have drawn on this conceptual tool, I want to offer one way in which this argument could be refuted. There will be those who will, legitimately, question whether I have considered the agency of White people who sought to improve the attainment of Black children because they considered it to be, for no other reason, a moral imperative to do so. For example, CRT scholars have documented the contribution made by White people, working with their Black counterparts, to challenge racial inequality (Bell, 1980; Gillborn, 2002; Leonardo, 2002). It is this that makes this explanation plausible. However, the problem with this argument in this circumstance is that it fails to take account of the inaction prior to this period. What I mean by this is why did they act when they did? Why did they not act sooner in order to enact change in London and focus on raising the attainment of Black children? Bell (1980) accounted for this in the interest convergence principle when he argued that, in the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case, the White people who acted on the basis of morality were insufficient in number (as was the case in the endeavour to abolish slavery). This may also be a plausible explanation here, but would require further research to establish this in any meaningful way. However, as Mutua (2006:385) pointed out, 'race is economically, socially, and institutionally grounded and reproduced even where individuals are present and consciously committed to eradicating racism'.

## **The London media**

The data gives rise to the view that parents' outrage about the standard of education created an imperative for successive governments to prioritise London. However, it also suggests that the media was critical. Earlier in this chapter, I referred to the role the media played in mobilising the neoliberal agenda through the way in which it framed educational inequality about the attainment of the so-called White Working Class. At this juncture, I want to argue that the data suggests that it played a crucial role on amplifying their outrage and forcing New Labour to prioritise London and locate its flagship school improvement programme in the capital. Indeed, Kidson and Norris (2014:3) characterised the crisis as being 'stoked by a strident London media'. This is evident of what Baroutsis (2016:567) argued is the media's coverage of schools, which is often 'negative, critical, oppressive' and a manifestation of the 'reductionist discourses' that include the perception of schools in crisis'.

Several reports and research into London have also highlighted this issue. For example, Baars et al., (2014:40) found that whilst at the time some evidence suggested that the quality of London schools was mixed, the media and politicians in London held an opposing view. Similarly, Kidson and Norris (2014) concluded that the widening gap between those schools rated outstanding and other schools heightened the sense of crisis amongst parents, councillors and MPs which, they argue, was fuelled by the media.

It is arguably the case that the media's role was even more significant because of New Labour's sensitivities towards all media criticism. For example, prior to the incoming government taking office it had developed an 'obsession' (Kuhn, 2005:95) with media management, which continued when it was in office (and was, arguably, evident in this case). For example, after leaving office Tony Blair (PM) gave the following evidence to the Leveson Inquiry (2012) into the culture and practices of the press:

By the time I took over the leadership of the Labour Party, we'd lost four elections in a row, we'd actually never won two consecutive full elections in our history (...). I was absolutely determined that we should not be subject to the same onslaught (...).

We paid inordinate attention in the early days of New Labour to courting, assuaging and persuading the media (Cited in Leveson, 2012: 1140).

Peter Mandelson (MwP), who was a Cabinet Minister in the New Labour government and played a pivotal role in managing the media (see, for example, Mandelson, 2010) is cited in the Leveson Report (2012) as saying:

Now, part of that was to reassure the media that we weren't the same Labour Party, and that, in a sense, trying to persuade them that we were no longer the toxic brand of the 1980s you could describe as an attempt to sort of neutralise, to sort of take the roughest edges off their hostility to us (Cited in Leveson, 2012: 1140).

This media management approach, which involved taking the 'roughest edges' (ibid) off the media's hostility towards New Labour, is evident in their enactment of education policy in London. Kidson and Norris (2014:4) point to the following:

The aim of breaking decisively with persistently-poor educational outcomes presented ministers and officials with a number of knotty implementation challenges, such as: managing the public profile of the policy in the context of media criticism of London schools and a sense of 'crisis' in school standards among parents and politicians.

This approach was also adopted by the Coalition. For example, Ken Clark (MwP), who was a Cabinet Minister in the Coalition, but also responsible for enacting neoliberal policies in the Conservative governments led by Margaret Thatcher and John Major, argued that '[n]ext week's headlines are given more priority than serious policy development and the long-term consequences for the nation, (Clarke, 2016:462).

It is arguably the case, therefore, that the media played a dual role as stakeholders (i.e. parents and friends of parents of this particular social circle) and commentators of education policy in London. In addition, the role of the media and politicians may have been

heightened further by the proximity of journalists, media commentators and politicians to this issue (i.e. so many of them were based in London) (Hutchings et. al., 2012).

### **Interest convergence and public opinion**

One of the inherent problems with suggesting that there is an association between the interests of White people and government policy is establishing how those who take decisions on behalf of White people know what the recipients want. In this thesis, I have argued that the media played a pivotal role in this process. One possible explanation is what one may describe as public opinion. Taylor (2016) broached this factor in relation to interest convergence in an article on affirmative action in order to demonstrate its role in policy enactment concerned with race. I do not, however, wish to dwell on the definitional issues that are associated with this concept, but I do want to briefly explain how public opinion should be understood within the context of this thesis and then suggest why it is important in this study. In order to do so, I want to draw on a small amount of literature from the academic fields of communications studies, public policy and political science.

Peters (1995), who is a scholar of communication studies, argued that Public opinion is a political concept that derives from ancient political theory, but only emerged in the late eighteenth century. After reviewing some of the literature concerned with public opinion, the political scientist Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann (1995:34) concluded that it is 'instrumental in the process of opinion formation and decision making in a democracy' and exists to promote social integration and to ensure there is consensus upon which actions and decisions can be taken. It is arguably the case, therefore, that public opinion is intrinsically linked to the decision-making process of government (whether it is accepted or rejected) and, as a result, important to any analysis of the interests governments and their agencies seek to address when enacting policy. As a result, within the context of this thesis, public opinion should be thought of as the collective thoughts of a society's members as they exist and/or are perceived. Clearly, this definition is very simplistic and has a number of failings (some of which are inherent in the data I will set out in relation to public opinion on education). Possibly the most salient of these is that it fails to recognise that public opinion,



as it is perceived and/or interpreted by institutions such as the media and the government, often reflects the dominant view of powerful groups (be that with regard to gender, ethnicity, social class etc.).

This brings into question the use of collective as an adjective in this definition. However, what this definition, as well as the literature it is drawn from, offers is a broad outline of the notion that there are institutions such as the government that are at least aware of the views of the people it governs (whether they are accurately interpreted or not) that have the potential to inform government policy.

A further issue requires consideration in any attempt to understand the role of public opinion in interest convergence. That is the mechanism by which public opinion is conveyed to those who are the decision makers. Here, I also want to draw on literature outside the academic field of education and three arguments in particular. The literature concerns what McCombs and Shaw (1972:172) described as 'agenda setting'. This describes the way in which issues gain public attention. Anthony Downs (1972) placed a significant emphasis on the role of the media in the development and enactment of public policy. He argued that without media coverage, issues of concern to the public (or particular groups within it) almost certainly go unnoticed and, therefore, do not receive high levels of public concern (ibid). For example, he argued that the race riots in America were shown nightly on the television screens, so public attention was naturally focused on the causes and consequences, but when they ceased public attention sharply declined (Downs, 1972). Mayer (1991:21), who was interested in how 'customer problems become transformed into consumer issues', sought to test the argument that issues go through three stages: 'they are publicised by the mass media, then they arouse public opinion, and only then they are addressed by public policymakers'. The third explanation was popularised by McCombs and Shaw (1972:172), who argued that media organisations are able to influence the political agenda:

In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given

issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position. In reflecting what candidates are saying during a campaign, the mass media may well determine the important issues—that is, the media may set the “agenda” of the campaign.

### **Whiteness and prioritisation of interests**

There is one further factor that requires consideration. Given the limited ethnic diversity within these groups, it is arguably the case that the coalition demanding government action (i.e. middle class parents, media personnel and politicians) were more often than not White. For example, six percent of MPs in the House of Commons and Members of the House of Lords are from an ethnic minority background (Audickas, 2016); fewer than 10% of Conservative and Labour MPs are working class (Heath, 2015); and 94% of journalists are White, 98%, have Bachelor’s degrees and 36% are based in London (Thurman et al., 2016). This is important because, one may arrive at the view that the ethnicity and social class of those campaigning for government action was a significant factor in mobilising successive governments to act. Indeed, the data in this section gives rise to the view that New Labour and its successors prioritised London in response to the self-interest of the White middle class and their allies, as opposed to the need to address the underachievement of Black children, White (or any other children) from disadvantaged backgrounds.

This leads one to consider how and why the interests of White people are dominant in the enactment of policy. An appropriate explanation may be ‘Whiteness’ (Harris, 1993:1709; Leonardo, 2004:137), which is a concept I first set out in chapter 2. One may, therefore, arrive at the view that whiteness ‘shapes public opinion’ (Taylor, 1998: 122) and, as a result, creates imperatives for government action. Mary Dudziak (2000: 106), for example, described the Brown versus Board of Education decision as a ‘Cold War imperative’. In this specific case, the imperatives were those demanded by the White middle class for better schools.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have drawn attention to several issues with regard to underachievement and the extent to which they have been prioritised by successive governments during the period this thesis is concerned with. First, I set out the data in relation to underachievement (i.e. who successive governments deemed the underachieving groups of children to be). Second, I drew attention to the policies these administrations enacted in order to raise the attainment of these groups. Third, I set out the data in relation to the heightened policy activity in London and why this may have taken place.

The data suggests that Black children were one of three salient groups that were identified as underachieving in the education system and, therefore, required intervention. Yet, it also suggests that very little action or policy enactment took place at a national level or in schools in order to address this problem. The most prominent group were the so-called 'White working class'. The policy response to the perceived underachievement of this group was more robust. However, there was evidence that gave rise to the view that, due to the way in which policies such as the Pupil Premium was designed (i.e. they were targeted at all disadvantaged children), Black children may have benefited. The data also suggests that London was prioritised in order to address the concerns of the White middle class, but that Black children may have benefited from the heightened policy activity in London because they were located in this region in large numbers.

Subsequently, I arrived at the conclusion that (a) the policies enacted to address race inequality in education have been symbolic, because they have been enacted to appease the heightened concern with regard to institutional racism following the Stephen Lawrence case; (b) the most meaningful attempt to respond to issues of race inequality in the education system have been those concerned with the so called 'White Working Class', but given the way in which these policies were designed Black children may still have drawn some benefit from them; and (c) the most effective policies at addressing underachievement of Black children in London were not intended to serve the interests of this group nor address their concerns, but those of the White middle class. Therefore, it is possible to contend the

enactment of education policy in London can be accounted for in the CRT concept of interest convergence, as it may be the case that the interests of Black children in achieving racial equality (i.e. raising their educational attainment) was only accommodated when they converged with the interests of their White counterparts (Bell, 1980).

## 6. State Intervention

Basing education on testing is as mindless today as when Dickens ridiculed it in *Hard Times*. Yet its appeal to British governments – from the days of Lord Baker to those of Michael Gove - is relentless. The reason is simple: it holds the easiest means of central control. It is the dictatorship of number (Simon Jenkins, 2015a.para.6).

We take our collective pulse 24 hours a day with the use of statistics. We understand life that way, though somehow the more figures we use, the more the great truths seem to slip through our fingers. Despite all that numerical control, we feel as ignorant of the answers to the big questions as ever (Boyle, 2001.para 6).

### Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on the second theme of this thesis. It is concerned with examining the effect the policies that I drew attention to in the previous chapter (i.e. those that formed part of the heightened activity in London) had on the attainment of Black children. It is not my intention to evaluate each policy, but to focus on the key components that appear to have contributed to the improvements in attainment in London. As a result, I will draw attention to the data that is concerned with setting out how successive government sought to improve the performance of schools by (a) making each school more accountable for its own performance and (b) intervening in the local authorities and schools deemed to be underperforming. I will conclude that policy enactment in London was informed by the school accountability regime which determined subsequent government action. Indeed, it is arguably the case that this regime was tantamount to 'governance through coercion' (Lipman, 2013:558). I will also conclude that the school accountability regime worked to the advantage of some Black children in London, whilst disadvantaging others.

## **Accountability**

I want to begin by briefly deconstructing the notion of accountability in the public sector. Accountability is a 'multi-layered concept' (Ranson, 2003:460) that is predicated on different mandatory 'social relationships of regulation' (ibid), which involve being held responsible for something to a greater or lesser extent, such as a decision, policy, practice, outcome etc. In these relationships, performance is evaluated according to an established standard (Ranson, 2003). Accountability derives from political systems and parliamentary democracy, as well as economic operations in business (Baroutsis, 2016:569). It is arguably the case that advocates of neoliberalism advance 'market-driven accountability practices' in education which can purportedly realise improvements in efficiency, productivity and overall effectiveness (ibid). I shall return to this specific issue later in this chapter.

In England, the central political and bureaucratic structures have played a significant role in the establishment and enactment of accountability systems in the public sector. It is Parliament and central government, for example, that set many of the standards that local bureaucratic organisations and agencies must adhere to. They hold these organisations to account by judging their performance against nationally defined standards that are informed by knowledge from and the private sector. For instance, Parliament holds the government, as well as non-Ministerial Departments, such as Ofsted, to account on behalf of the public. In turn, central government holds various local bureaucracies and agencies to account, such as LAs and schools. These national arrangements are not unique to the UK, but it is arguably the case that they have resulted in this country becoming one of the most centralised countries in the developed world, compared to other states of comparable size (Gash et al., 2014).

## **School accountability**

School accountability was a re-occurring theme in the data I gathered. Many of the participants referred to it (either in its entirety or one or more of its constituent parts). Set out below are two observations made by the participants:

*Accountability is the word that has appeared in education in the last decade. This accountability means (...) staff are asked "why is it Bob, who is supposed to get Cs and is getting Cs in all these other subjects, not [getting a grade C] your subject?"*  
(Mr Connelly, HT).

*If you're chucking a lot of money into the system you need to know that it is good value for money in terms of what is being done within the system* (Mrs Watson, CS).

Mr Connelly (HT) appears to have suggested that the school accountability system is an increasingly important part of the education sector. This view was also held by Christine Gilbert, who is a former HMCI:

It is hard to imagine any discussion of education reform among policymakers or professionals where the word 'accountability' would not be used (...). It is entrenched and well supported by the public, particularly by parents (Gilbert, 2013:4-7).

Christine Gilbert argued that the increased attention afforded to school accountability can be attributed to the pressure placed on schools and teachers to improve, the culture of centralised systems of accountability in this country and the attempts to move the school sector towards 'a truly self-improving system' (ibid). David Miliband (MoS) seemingly shared this view and suggested that accountability was central to the democratic process:

Accountability is in some ways the foundation of public services today. Without accountability there is no legitimacy; without legitimacy there is no support; without support there are no resources; and without resources there are no services (Miliband, 2004,para.17).

Mrs Watson's observation above seemed to be more pragmatic (although no less democratically minded) as she associated school accountability with resources (as Ed Miliband does, too). Nicky Morgan (SoS) made a similar point:

The public rightly expects their elected government to hold schools to account for the outcomes young people achieve and the investment tax payers put in (Morgan, 2016.para.32).

These arguments are consistent with the academic work in this area, which highlights the importance of accountability mechanism in the public sector (including schools) and argues that school accountability systems give parents and the public the opportunity to understand what schools do, how well they are doing and to ensure that their leaders take responsibility when things go wrong (Brooks and Tough, 2006; Figlio and Loeb, 2011). However, the data set out above also gives rise to the view that the school accountability system did not simply monitor and report on the performance of schools. Instead, it suggests that it served a much more dynamic role. Set out below are observations made by two of the participants:

*This kind of school accountability definitely started with New Labour. I can't remember the exact dates but from about 1997 to 2006 there was an absolute focus on outcomes (Mr Fitzpatrick, AHT & CS).*

*There is a really strong belief amongst both the Tories and the Liberal Democrat side of the Coalition that basically having 40% of kids getting 5 A\* to C or 50% 5 A\* to C is just not good enough (...) so I think there is a genuine commitment to try and use the accountability measures as a lever to drive up standards (Mrs Watson, CS).*

These extracts suggest that successive governments sought to use the school accountability system as a tool for raising standards. This appears to be a view that was shared by Ministers and their advisors. Michael Gove (SoS), for example, said the following:



[The] sharper accountability from improved league tables and a strengthened Ofsted—are raising standards in state schools (HC Deb 11 June 2013).

Similarly, Nick Gibb (MoS), who was a DfE Minister in the Coalition and Conservative governments, said the following:

As Poland has demonstrated in their far-reaching and successful reforms, stronger accountability leads to better results for pupils (Gibb, 2015.para.45).

In determining how the school accountability system was able to assist successive governments in raising standards, Mr Hammond (CS) likened the school accountability regime to a lever and claimed it could change behaviour in schools. He credited the performance measures and Ofsted, which were some of the most important components of the accountability regime, with making schools responsive to government policy:

Any government department has very few levers to make things happen, but there are three things that are important. Money is one. People use money as a motivator (...). Legislation is another, so if it passes a law it is made compulsory (...). The third lever is the accountability systems, such as Ofsted and GCSE results.

Jacqui Smith (MoS) claimed that the accountability system (through the establishment of targets) put pressure on schools and made them responsive to government policies:

While those on the frontline were undoubtedly put under pressure by new targets and expectations, they could also recognise that these came from a fundamental belief that there was a comprehensive role for state schools and the NHS – they should not be allowed to fade into safety-net services while most aspired to find alternatives (Smith, 2015:4).

Tom Richmond, who was a Senior Policy Advisor at the DfE, stated that the school accountability regime identified weaknesses in the school system:

[E]xternal accountability systems (...) perform a vital role in identifying weak performance, tackling poor practice, protecting pupils and driving improvement (Richmond, 2016.para.16).

In addition, Michael Gove (SoS) stated the following:

[The] central accountability measure helps identify those schools in the most difficult circumstances (Michael Gove, cited in Parliament. House of Commons, 2012.para.25).

In terms of its impact, Mr Parker (AHT) claimed that the school accountability regime (along with the intervention programmes, which is a government tool I will address later in this chapter) was able to influence, if not dictate, the priorities and policies of schools:

Government is powerful. It makes things happen in this office and in this school. There is no doubt about that. Some of its injunctions and desires maybe do not translate into practice for whatever reason, but at the sharp end of things, the things you're held to account for, they certainly damn well do. London Challenge is perhaps the most obvious example of that.

This is an argument that was also pursued by Mr Hammond (CS) who suggested that the accountability regime is used by government as a means of steering schools towards meeting specific targets:

*I think it's right and true that the Department, the government to some extent, will set the priorities and they will position the goalposts.*

However, some of the participants argued that school accountability as it was constructed led to a number of issues:

*I am not at all shy of accountability. Accountability is essential, but it's the side effects of accountability which is really where there is a tension. It's what happens with the competitiveness that those accountability measures create between different parts of the education system, in a locality for example (...). So there's an enormous amount of effort and resource put into all of that (Ms Carrington, HT).*

*The consequences of accountability measures that don't take into consideration other factors. For example, it has led to school of different status and types and structures that dictate the kind of work we [as a LA maintained school] can do as it exacerbates inequality (Ms Carrington, HT).*

*[Accountability] is vital. It sets the direction; it sets the weather and we've had ten years of target driven, statistic obsessed, race to achieve, alongside some really good things that have happened. But we have had so many initiatives between 1997 and this year that you don't know which way to turn really. Absolutely exhausting. Regulations left, right and centre (Mr Parker, AHT).*

The data above gives rise to a number of important issues. The first concerns the purpose of the school accountability regime. As I have already made reference to, the data seems to suggest that it was considered a tool for raising standards. For example, according to many of the observations above, it was able to make schools responsive to pressure for them to change and improve. This is consistent with arguments made by scholars such as Brooks and Tough (2006), Ball (2012) and Francis et al. (2017). Moreover, whilst recognising that some scholars are sceptical of the view that a school accountability regime can realise improvements in school and student performance (Baroutsis, 2016), if one accepts the accounts offered in the primary and secondary data, it is possible to construct an argument in support of the view that, during the period of time this thesis is concerned with, it has indeed contributed to improvements in the headline performance measure. For example, the data and scholarly work suggests that at least some of the improvements in the education system can be attributed to the incentivising, rewarding and sanctioning of schools based on their performance (Ball, 2003; Baroutsis, 2016). Furthermore, the data suggests that, as a

result of these incentives, rewards and sanctions, the school accountability regime was able to influence (or even dictate) the policies schools enacted. If this is indeed the case it confirms that, during the time this thesis is concerned with, school accountability was not only a system of performance management but a regime akin to what Ball (2003:16) described as 'performativity'. Ball (2003:16) argued that performativity can be thought of as 'a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change' that are based on material and symbolic rewards and sanctions.

The second issue concerns the relationship between the school accountability regime and neoliberalism. It is arguably the case that this regime was informed by, and gave rise to, the neoliberal ideas concerning competition and privatisation. The incentive, rewards and sanctions arrangement is an illustration of this, as it appears that the school accountability regime mediated those components. For example, as I explained in chapter 3, advocates of neoliberalism argue that the relationship between the state and the provider should be transnational, as it is the most efficient way of realising the desired results. This means the state should use its funds and powers to incentivise, reward and sanction public and private organisations based on their performance. The data suggests that some politicians and officials considered the school accountability regime to be the facilitator of these arrangements in the education system. This is important because, as I also set out in chapter 3, these kinds of policies can damage the public sector ethos and give rise to perverse incentives. As I will go on to demonstrate later in this chapter and the next, these issues arose in the education system and possibly had an impact on the attainment of Black children.

### **The incentivising state**

The evidence in the previous section suggests that successive governments used the school accountability regime to force schools to prioritise its work on raising standards. It appears from the data in this section that they did so by devising targets and performance measures. Targets can be thought of within the context of this thesis as specific results or milestones,

which are invariably quantifiable, that schools are required to achieve. Performance measures, again within the context of this thesis, refer to quantitative information created by the government and other agencies that inform the accountability regime on how individual schools, and in some cases all schools, carry out specific functions. It is arguably the case that there were three important data sets that informed the school accountability regime. They were:

- **Attainment data:** the examination and assessment results at the end of KS2 and the GCSE (and equivalent) assessment and examination results at the end of KS4.
- **Progress data:** a measure of how far children have advanced, or otherwise, between the end of the assessments and examinations at KS2 and the results they achieve at KS4.
- **School effectiveness grade:** the score each school received from Ofsted after an inspection.

There were, of course, other data sets which were important (or at least considered in the school accountability regime). For example, the number of school exclusions, school attendance, KS3 teacher assessments, progression from KS4 to Post-16 education and the number of young people not in education, employment or training. Many of these were considered to be important by politicians, officials, senior leaders and other stakeholders.

It appears to be the case that successive governments devised targets and performance measures in order to quantify levels of performance (particularly underperformance). For example, one of the participants said the following:

*Everyone is scared about not getting the school target (Mrs Akiloy, DHT).*

This is also exemplified by the following statement by the Conservative government which stated that it was important to set the right measures in order to realise the level of performance it required:

An effective accountability system ensures that professionals are held accountable for the outcomes of their decisions using fair, intelligent, reliable and carefully-balanced measures of success and failure (DfE, 2016:21).

These 'measures of success and failure' (ibid) have been devised as targets and performance measures that are consistent with the discipline of the neoliberal conceptualisation of the market. For example, when the participants were asked to reflect on the role of targets and performance measures in the school accountability regime and the education system more broadly, they offered several observations. The most striking of these responses came from Mrs Watson (CS):

*You know, what gets measured gets done. You know, if you focus on how many trains are on time more trains become on time. All of that sort of stuff came from Sir Michael Barber. He had a really profound effect on an enormous amount of social policy and especially in education. London Challenge is in some ways the child of a lot of that but tempered by more, sort of local nuances.*

*I suppose that is the rub of education policy, (...) everyone tries to make stuff better and you need to measure whether or not you are making it better.*

Mr Connelly (HT) made a similar point:

*The use of data came from a sense of investment and outcome and the Labour Party saying how are we going to improve our international standing? The life chances of nations, schools and cities could not be improved without being able to measure it.*

Mr Llywelyn (HT) referred to league tables in his observation:

*I was a great fan of league tables because (...) they exposed just how badly schools were doing (...). I remember using them as a benchmark. I think all through my time I used league tables to push the performance of kids (Mr Llywelyn, HT) .*

Mr Parker (AHT) made a similar point with regard to data being used to demonstrate performance:

*What we have now of course is this wealth of prior attainment data and predictive data that we can use to say ok this kid is capable of, can she get to there, therefore she's giving us credit, we're into CVA<sup>24</sup> and you know that all looks good for the school.*

What is particularly interesting about these observations is that not only do they illustrate how important targets and performance measures were, but also suggest that quantitative data played a much wider role in the education system. For example, Mr Parker (AHT) seems to have claimed that quantitative data is able to offer foresight (i.e. it is capable of making predictions about the attainment of students) which the school can use to demonstrate its performance in a favourable way. Notice, for instance, that he does not offer any caveats with regard to the vulnerabilities or limitations of statistical data in this regard. His assertion is not tentative but certain in what it offers. Several other participants also referred to the importance of data beyond those used as targets and performance measures:

*We are so data led. Everything is driven by data (Mrs Ainsworth, DHT).*

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<sup>24</sup> CVA, which refers to Contextual Value Added, were predicted scores calculated using KS2 test scores but also, principally, age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status (Leckie and Goldstein, 2016). The DfE published KS2-KS4 CVA, which was a measurement of students' attainment in comparison to their counterparts with similar social, economic and cultural factors that were deemed to be outside a school's control but were known to affect children's performance (DfE, 2017c).

*I have responsibility for data so it is a priority for me that data should be real data to use on a day to day basis. It's used by departments and students and it should be accurate. It should be part and parcel of every student's and teacher's day (Mr O'Leary, AHT).*

*As a system we have got a lot more scientific about how we use data. The quality of information that I have now compared to when I first started teaching is incredibly different (Mr Fitzpatrick, AHT & CS).*

*The War Room [at the DfE] was in part an acknowledgement that we needed to be more refined in how we consider the impact of policies; particularly the fine details of what we want to do and how we were going to achieve it in a more scientific and robust way. And that was related to the issue of the gaps in the performance of various groups of students (Mr Fitzpatrick, AHT & CS).*

*Data is absolutely vital evidence to have to base your interventions on, otherwise decisions would be anecdotal; it wouldn't be the same (Mr Connelly, HT).*

*Data is definitely big within education and society as a whole. I would say that we have become obsessed with things being measured (Mr Wilson, AHT).*

*I think data has been absolutely fundamental to the development and extension of the standards agenda (Mrs Watson, CS).*

The secondary data also seems to suggest that data played an increasingly important role in the education system. Michael Wilshaw (HMCI), for example, said the following:

*The data we have on schools now is very sophisticated and very good. It helps the inspectorate as well as head teachers to identify issues at an early stage and deal with them (Cited in Parliament. House of Lords, 2016.Q112).*



It is arguably the case that the participants' proficiency in explaining how data is used in the education system, and by inference how important it is, acts as evidence in support of the view that quantitative data was embedded in the sector at that time. For example, the statements above made by the participants may lead one to conclude that they consider data to be a factual reality, rather than an interpretation of it. This is an issue I will return to later in this chapter, but one may argue that not only did quantitative data permeate the education system; it was also afforded a hegemonic status. This is also exemplified by the following extracts by Michael Gove (SoS) and Nicky Morgan (SoS):

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 (Gove, 2010a:113).

[S]chools find themselves collecting ever more data, and even more frustratingly, sometimes the same data in different formats for different people (Morgan, 2016a.para.21).

There is also research that suggests that the increase in the use of data in London was intensified with the enactment of London Challenge (see, for example, Kidson and Norris, 2014).

These findings (i.e. the increased use of, and hegemonic status afforded to quantitative data) are consistent with arguments made by scholars with regard to the education system in England but also internationally (Morrison, 2001; Biesta, 2007; Selwyn et al., 2015; Fin, 2016; Williamson, 2016; Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017). For example, Ball (2015) and Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes (2017) argued that schools have become obsessed with the use of data in what they consider to be a neoliberal education policy environment (which I too have argued in this thesis). Indeed, Ball (2015:299) wrote the following:

Numbers define our worth, measure our effectiveness and, in a myriad of other ways, work to inform or construct what we are today (...). Measurement and monitoring as techniques for reflection and representation play a particular role within the contemporary relationship between truth and power and the self that we call neoliberalism. (...) In teaching, the articulation of performance and improvement in terms of student test scores is more and more widely linked to another set of numbers – money – in the form of reward – that is performance-related pay.

### **Moving the goal posts**

The data also suggests that successive governments altered the performance measures in order to incentivise schools to respond to the school accountability regime. For example, one of the participants said the following in relation to changes made in order to ensure schools entered children for GCSEs as oppose to vocational qualifications:

*It is a brave and confident Headteacher who says to the government I don't care how you're counting your GCSEs, an NVQ in hairdressing is what my pupils need to do (...). The Tories introduced the EBacc<sup>25</sup> and the number of children doing languages has gone up and up. Are kids more interested in language now? No, but they now have to do a language. It also leads to more language teachers being recruited too. The accountability lever is blunt (Mr Hammond, CS).*

The secondary data confirms this view. For example, the Conservative government claimed that it wanted the EBacc to be central to children's education:

The government wants the EBacc to become the default for pupils, with the exception of a small minority of pupils for whom it is not appropriate (DfE, 2015f:31).

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<sup>25</sup> The English Baccalaureate (EBacc) is a performance measure introduced in 2010 by the Coalition. It sets out the proportion of children in a school that have been entered for and achieved A\*-C grades in GCSE English, mathematics, science, history or geography and a foreign language.

The reason for this, according to Michael Gove (SoS), is that it appropriately prepares children for further education:

Every child should expect that they should leave school with at least a C pass in English and mathematics. I think that, more than that, we should be significantly more ambitious in making sure that more and more children, for example, get the qualifications in the English Baccalaureate that enable them to go on to the college or university course of their choice or the job or apprenticeship that will be satisfying (Gove, cited in Parliament. House of Commons, 2012.para.24).

Despite its importance, however, the Government chose not to make the EBacc compulsory. In a foreword to a Conservative government consultation, for example, Nicky Morgan (SoS) identified that schools were not compelled to offer the EBacc (DfE, 2015f:5). Yet, she also stated the following:

We [are] committed to introducing an expectation that every child should study the EBacc subjects by 2020 (...) we intend to achieve that (ibid).

What is interesting about this statement is that Morgan states that schools are not 'compelled' (ibid) to enter students for EBacc subjects but, as Mr Hammond observed, the Coalition and Conservative governments have been able to change the policies of schools in this regard by making the EBacc a specific performance measure:

In order to encourage and reward those schools that teach EBacc subjects well, the current EBacc achievement measure will be retained as a headline in the new accountability system. This recognises the proportion of pupils achieving a good pass in a combination of all of these core subjects (DfE, 2015f:23).

In addition to this, Ofsted will play a role by taking the measure into consideration when inspecting schools:

Future EBacc entry and achievement will be given a more prominent role in determining whether schools are meeting these requirements although, as now, no single measure will determine the outcome of an inspection (DfE, 2015f:23).

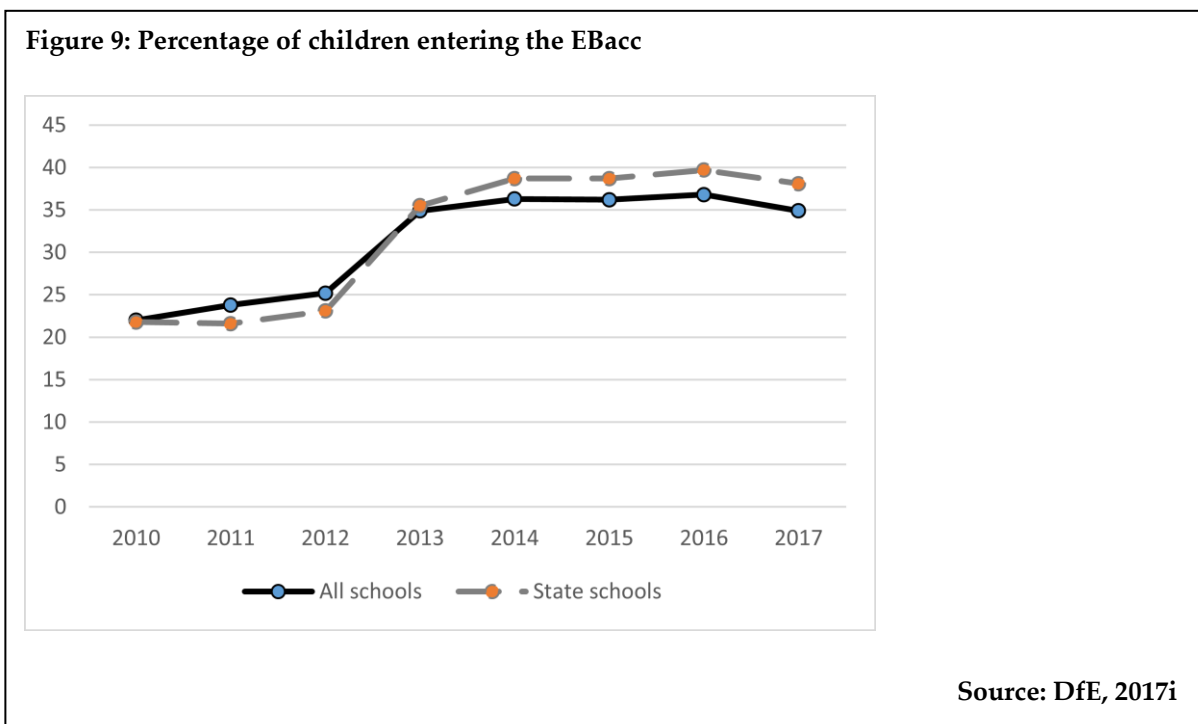
A more recent example of this would be the introduction of the Progress 8 measure that appears to have influenced examination entries. For instance, in 2017 the number of children entered for GCSE English (which contributed to Progress 8) increased as Level 1 or 2 certificates in English (which did not contribute to this new measure) decreased (Ofqual, 2017). Ofqual (2017) attributed this change to the introduction of Progress 8.

Graham Stuart (Ch.HoCEC) appears to have recognised that these measures meant that schools would respond in a particular way. In a rebuttal to Michael Gove (SoS), he said the following:

If you create the framework, you create the incentives (...). People will follow the incentives you create and you should not be naïve or try to suggest those people have moral failings if they deliver what you say you want. If you say you want something and the system says it wants something, that is what you will get (Cited in Parliament. House of Commons, 2012.para.45).

It is arguably the case, therefore, that the Coalition and Conservative governments were able to determine the policies schools enacted (in this case, to increase the number of children studying EBacc subjects) by simply setting out the courses to be included in the EBacc, then creating a specific performance measure based on the number of children in each school taking the EBacc and those reaching the benchmark and then requiring Ofsted to take it into consideration when judging schools (which effectively meant schools being sanctioned for non-compliance and underperformance). This, arguably, is reflected in the increased number of children taking EBacc subjects between 2010 (21.8%) and (39.7%) (DfE, 2017g) (see Figure 9).

In addition, Attainment 8 comprises of eight subjects (i.e. English, maths, three further qualifications which count towards the EBacc and three other qualifications from the DfE approved list). The DfE (2017g) referred to these as 'slots'. If a child has not taken the maximum number of qualifications that count in each slot, he/she will receive a point score of zero where a slot is empty. What is particularly interesting is that, in 2015, children in state-funded schools filled an average of 2.4 EBacc slots compared to 2.7 in 2017. The DfE (2017i:5) attributed the increase in part to 'schools' behaviour change as pupils enter more qualifications that count towards the new measures'.



Alongside this, the Conservative government adjusted the points each GCSE grade was worth in the performance tables (see Table 5), which one may argue was also a decision taken in order to assist in its efforts to incentivise and sanction performance.

### School accountability and performance

In this chapter, I have sought to draw attention to the data which suggests that the school accountability regime was a powerful tool for raising standards in London and, therefore, may explain in part why the attainment of Black children improved. For example, the data

from politicians, senior leaders and others suggests that performance measures incentivised schools to focus on raising standards and had the potential to influence the policies schools enacted. This is significant in the context of this thesis because these accounts, alongside the data I will set out in the remainder of this chapter, makes it possible to arrive at the conclusion that schools in London improved by ensuring as many children as possible, irrespective of their ethnicity, met the headline measure. I want to offer an example in order to illustrate this point. The following observation was made by Michael Wilshaw (HMI) about a school where he was previously the Headteacher:

I was the head of a school where 80% of the youngsters came from an Afro-Caribbean background. (...) They did extraordinarily well because they were taught well by good teachers. They not only taught them well in the classroom but taught them outside school. They taught them in the twilight hours and at weekends and promoted literacy, numeracy and basic skills, and prepared them well for their examinations—a philosophy and culture almost universally supported by the parents (Cited in Parliament. House of Lords, 2016.Q111).

**Table 5: New point score scale for legacy GCSEs**

GCSE grades	Point score scales	
	2016	2017-2019
A*	8	8.5
A	7	7
B	6	5.5
C	5	4
D	4	3
E	3	2
F	2	1.5
G	1	1

**Source: DfE, 2017h**

It is possible for one to discern from this extract that Michael Wilshaw attributed the high levels of educational attainment of this overwhelmingly Black student body to teaching,

learning, intervention and parental support. I have deliberately chosen not to qualify his conclusion. However, in order to confirm the validity of his argument one may rightly claim that further research is required. One may want to understand, for example, the economic profile of the parents, as there is evidence to suggest that there is a relationship between parental income, ethnicity and attainment (see, for example, DfE, 2017; Strand, 2014), but that this relationship does not mitigate against the low expectation some research suggests some teachers have of middle class Black children (Rollock et al., 2015). Despite caveats such as this, which I have not substantiated either way, Michael Wilshaw does not offer the proportion of Black children, or their family income, as a key variable for the school's success. This is relevant because it exemplifies the central argument I have set out based on the data in this chapter, which is that if a school with a high proportion of Black children sought to be successful (measured by the headline measure) it had to focus on raising attainment, but it could not simply focus on White children, as raising the attainment of this disproportionately low number of pupils (which is often the case in London schools) would have resulted in failure. Instead, the school would have to target some Black children (in this particular case a very high proportion) if it was to succeed. It simply could not allow some of the issues I have drawn attention to, such as low expectations and discrimination in setting and streaming, to permeate the school. Indeed, one can envisage that in a school where eighty percent met the headline measure it is possible it had to actively mitigate some of these issues.

Therefore, returning to the interest convergence principle, just as Bell (1980) argued that political and economic interests were taken into consideration in the *Brown vs Board of Education* ruling, it is arguably the case that a similar process of thought took place in which the clear benefits of raising the attainment of Black children (i.e. the favourable reputation of the school in an education environment designed around competition and performativity) were considered alongside any risks (in this case there were no apparent costs for White people). Of course, as the interest convergence principle denotes, whilst some Black children may have benefited from this activity, it was not intended to address the concerns of Black people or the needs of Black children. Instead, it was intended to respond to the pressures

placed on schools by the accountability regime. As I argued in chapter 5, those pressures were motivated by the imperative to improve schools in London.

Setting out this conclusion in such detail at this juncture has the potential for one to assume the existence of a *fait accompli*. Therefore, I now want to draw attention to the data that illustrates not only how the presence of targets and performance measures incentivised schools to focus on raising standards, but also the various ways in which they were designed to influence the policies schools enacted. This is important because in addressing the central question at the heart of this thesis, it may be the case that the way in which these targets and performance measures were designed, dictated the way in which Black children were organised and taught in London schools and, ultimately, may have affected their attainment both positively and adversely.

### **Targets and the headline measure**

As I have set out earlier, the most salient performance measures in the accountability regime is what I have referred to as the headline performance measure. This is confirmed by the primary and secondary data, which is exemplified by the following statements:

*The five A\* to C including English and maths is the most valued external measure (Mr Foster, AHT).*

*Five A\* - C is the benchmark for getting anywhere in the world (Mr Llywelyn, HT).*

*The 5 A\* to Cs created market forces so parents as a client group suddenly had information about which schools were more or less successful (...). The parent, the public, the client group were able to access customer data a bit like price comparisons across supermarkets, but suddenly it was happening in a different way in schools (Mr Connelly, HT).*

This view is consistent with the secondary data. David Laws (MoS), for example, said the following:



Until now secondary schools have been judged by the proportion of pupils awarded 5 GCSEs at grade C or better, including English and maths (Laws, 2013.para.2).

The data also suggests that schools and senior leaders described their status and performance in relation to performance measures in exactly the same way:

*It was a failing school in that its results were always below 40% five A\* to C, including English and Maths. There was very little value added (Mr Foster, AHT).*

*Senior leaders judge themselves by Ofsted grades and their 5 A\* to C grades. If senior team gets them [positive Ofsted grades and headline performance measures] that looks good on them (Mr Sandbrook, AHT).*

One of the participants likened the use of data to the share price of a private business:

*I think if you went into business you might say it's about share price and what shareholders want (...) it's the same in education. I want to make a difference but (...) it's not just an altruistic thing (Mr Sandbrook, AHT).*

These observations add further weight to the argument I set out earlier in relation to the school accountability regime being synonymous with neoliberalism and its support for market principles being enacted in the public sector. The association made between a school's performance and a publicly listed company's share price by Mr Sandbrook (AHT), for example, is a demonstration of this, as it illustrates that just in the same way that a key measure for a company is its share price, in the quasi-market schools judged themselves first and foremost by their headline performance (irrespective of all other appropriate measures). Indeed, as Ball (2003) argued, performativity gives rise to a performance being associated with worth, quality or value. It is important to emphasise that the secondary data also suggests that the performance of a school was seldom judged on the basis of one data set, but these performance measures were placed in a hierarchy. As a result, the headline

measure was critical in denoting whether a school was operating at an acceptable standard. The implication being that all aspects of a school's performance, not just the results its children achieved, were in part informed by the headline performance measure. This is exemplified by the following statement made by Michael Gove (SoS):

Schools that are not generating high levels of attainment are generally schools that are not doing well (Cited in Parliament. House of Commons, 2012.para.18).

Michael Gove made this statement to the House of Commons Education Committee prior to the enactment of Progress 8, but it does give rise to the view that a school could have been performing favourably in terms of some of the data measures I referred to earlier (such as progress, attendance and school exclusions), yet still be deemed to be underperforming because of its performance against the headline measure. It is arguably the case that it is these conditions that made the headline performance measure high-stakes, which means 'there is a direct link between the tests and rewards and sanctions for students, their teachers or institutions' (Elwood et al., 2017:3).

Heath Monk, who was Chief Executive of the Future Leaders Trust (an organisation that trained and developed senior leaders), made a similar claim:

There is a recognition, as with the head teachers that I work with at my organisation, that you have to do something to improve the school. That is about establishing your credibility and, in many cases, saving your job. There is a short term "I have to get the results up" (Cited in Parliament. House of Commons, 2014b.para.23).

Heath Monk appears to have been critical of those Headteachers who only focused on doing enough to ensure their school reached the floor standard. Yet, he also recognised that, as the accountability regime was high stakes, the consequences of a school underperforming might be that the Headteacher's employment status was under threat (i.e. they were at risk of being dismissed from their post).

There is one further point that emerged from this data. If it is the case that schools are judged and indeed appraise themselves based on, first and foremost, government targets and performance measures (but in particular the headline performance measure), it means targets and performance measures did indeed represent powerful tools for raising standards. If this is the case, it adds weight to the central finding set out so far, which is that the school accountability regime was a powerful tool for raising standards). For example, one of the participants said the following:

*For me, schools are driven by their Ofsted grade and their 5 A\* to C grade. Schools which are not brilliant allow those things to permeate and dictate everything they do (Mr Sandbrook, AHT).*

In addition, Mr Llywelyn (HT) appears to suggest that in circumstances in which schools were unlikely to be judged favourably by Ofsted (i.e. good or outstanding) the school accountability in effect limited what Headteachers were prepared to do if it those actions did not assist the school in at least reaching the minimum performance set by government:

*If you're under the cosh as a Head; if you're likely not to get a good or outstanding Ofsted it's very, very difficult these day when the pressure is so intense for Heads to be able to keep their nerve and that is a tension that exists in schools.*

This view is consistent with some of the secondary data. For example, Graham Stuart (Ch.HoCEC) put to Michael Gove (SoS) that the headline performance measure was so important that it was able to determine the policies of schools (Parliament. House of Commons, 2012):

We still have I would suggest (...) that single anchor measure, that one metric, driving behaviour in secondary schools (Cited in Parliament. House of Commons, 2012.para.8).

In addition, Michael Gove stated the following:

We have tried to have an element of consistency in the most important measure, the anchor measure -five A\* to Cs, including English and maths. Because schools know that is the measure against which they will be measured and they will be held directly accountable if they fall below it, that acts as a spur to overall improvement for every student (cited in Parliament. House of Commons, 2012.para.4).

Mr Foster (AHT), on the other hand, rejected the view that the headline measure was of most importance when judging performance:

*Despite pressure from the academy chain, attainment goes hand in hand with progress. I could not accept a low progress measure in the same way I would not accept a low attainment figure.*

It is clear, however, that Mr Foster (AHT) recognised that he held his view despite the pressure placed on him by the trustees of his school to focus on attainment (thus reinforcing the central claim). Furthermore, it is arguably the case that the pressure Mr Foster recognised and accepted existed was the result of the way in which performance was judged through the school accountability regime. This suggests it did, therefore, have an impact on the policies schools enacted.

According to Barber (2007:80), setting targets is an inevitable function of government. They are the articulation of what a government wants to achieve and what the public can expect. They are the manifestation of 'what would success look like?' (ibid). This view is evident in the extract below in which the former Leader of the Opposition during the Coalition government, Ed Miliband, said the following:

In 1997, less than a third of London school students achieved five or more GCSEs at A to C. That rose to almost two thirds (Miliband, 2014.para.84).

Stephen Twigg, in his capacity as a former Shadow Secretary of State for Education made a similar point:

When we were in government, we raised standards across schools. On the performance measure of five A\* to C grades including English and maths, we went from 35% in 1997 to 59% in 2010 (HC Deb 11 June 2013).

It is arguably the case that the centrality of targets is evidence of the dominance of the neoliberal outlook. For example, it is possible to contend that those who adhere to neoliberalism consider targets to be 'specific, high (hard) goals' (Locke and Latham, 2006:267) that lead to higher levels of task performance than more general aspirations. Such thinking has been traditionally aligned to practices in the private sector, but have been incorporated into the public sector (Barber, 2007; Locke and Latham, 2006). This should come as no surprise given the close relationship neoliberal administrations have sought to establish between the private and public sectors (which I set out in detail in chapter 3). For instance, it is evident that 'large-scale assessment and testing has moved from being an instrument for decision-making about students to be the lever for holding schools accountable for results' (Fullan and Earl, 2003:384).

If, as Barber (2007) suggested, targets in the public sector are inevitable (although it is arguably the case that they are given heightened significance by those adherent to neoliberalism), it may explain why they played such an intrinsic role in the school accountability regime in terms of school standards. It may be helpful to offer an example in order to illustrate this point. In Opposition, New Labour committed itself to ensuring that, by 2002, eighty percent of 11-year olds would reach level 4 in English (Barber, 2007). This literacy target was eventually missed but, nevertheless, the New Labour government was able to publicise the progress made as evidence that its policies were securing improvements. It was able to claim that when it came to office a third of children left primary schools without having mastered the basics in English and maths, but in 2005 three-quarters achieve those basics in maths and even more in English (DfES, 2005:7). Whilst New Labour eventually came under significant criticism (particularly with regard to its first term

in office) for the large number of targets it set (Barber, 2007), it was able to make such claims because of the emphasis it placed on targets and performance measures. In sum, targets were essential to successive government securing the outcomes it sought (i.e. better performance).

### **Minimum standards**

The data suggests that minimum standards (i.e. a quantifiable level of performance that schools were expected to remain above) was devised and revised by successive governments as a means of articulating the expected standard of education. In 2015/16, for example, a school was deemed to be below the floor standards if its Progress 8 score was below -0.5 and its upper band of the 95% confidence interval was below zero (DfE, 2017g). In 2016, 282 schools were below the secondary school floor standard (London had the lowest percentage of schools (3.1%) below this standard) (ibid). Set out below is an observation made by one of the participants in relation to the floor standard:

*The floor target is a thing that Ofsted would look at and use. It would be part of the judgement and it would also be part of the assessment when they visited. Also, I think it's a thing that drives a lot of stuff in league tables, so in terms of the lever it's a lever for parents choosing to send their kids to school. It's not quite a benchmark but it has a currency and power to have it defined in that sort of way and it has consequences if you don't achieve that for your kids (Mrs Watson, CS).*

This suggests that the floor standard was an important measure because it assisted regulators and stakeholders in forming judgements about schools, but it also represented a trigger for government intervention. This gives rise to the view that, if judgments were influenced (or, indeed, informed) by floor standards, it made the performance measure even more important; thus increasing the pressure on schools to at least meet it, if not exceed it by a reasonable margin.

The significance Mrs Watson (CS) attached to floor standards is consistent with the way in which successive governments have approached the creation of these measures. For example, in 2001 New Labour set two floor standards. First, it stated that by 2004 all schools must have had at least 20% of its students achieving five or more GCSEs (or equivalent) at grade A\*–C, which was the previous headline performance measure (DfES, 2001:49). It then increased it and mandated that by 2006 at least 25% must have reached this measure (DfES, 2001:49). Michael Gove (SoS) credits Michael Barber with establishing the floor standard and makes a clear link between targets and improved performance:

As a result of policies that [Michael Barber] helped introduce - including an uncompromising focus on literacy, floor standards for school performance and higher standards for teacher performance - improvements were undoubtedly made (Gove, 2012.para.40-41).

In addition, he said the following to the House of Commons Education Committee:

I think they have been integral to school improvement. I am happy to criticise the last Government, but I am also delighted to be able to praise them. Floor standards were right (Cited in Parliament. House of Commons, 2012.para.37).

Indeed, Michael Gove (SoS) appears to have suggested that the floor standard was integral to raising standards in London:

We are unique amongst advanced industrial nations in having a capital city that outperforms the national average in terms of educational attainment. (...). One of the reasons for that is that floor standards were an integral part of the London Challenge right from the beginning (...) they are integral to raising expectation (Michael Gove, cited in Parliament. House of Commons, 2012.para.38).

Reducing the number of schools below the floor standard was one of the successes claimed by the Coalition. For example, Michael Gove (SOS) said the following:

And as we've made those minimum standards tougher, so the number of schools falling below them has dropped dramatically. (Gove, 2014).

One of the participants seems to have argued that these targets dehumanised children:

*They don't treat you as equal students, they treat you all as targets and grades to get. And yes, they may get to know; they may know your name, but deep down there will be discussions based on top end you'll be ok anyway, bottom end well you didn't come in with us expecting you to get it so we're OK with you not getting it, but if you're C/D borderline you'll get lots of attention (Mr Sandbrook, AHT).*

The data set out above illustrates the various ways in which minimum standards were used by successive governments as a means of incentivising schools to raise standards. It is also evident that minimum standards formed part of the measures successive governments enacted in London. Furthermore, this data is consistent with the conclusion Ball et al. (2012, 2012a) and Gillborn and Youdell (2000) arrived at in terms of the economy of student worth (I made reference to this work earlier).

### **Measuring progress**

I now want to turn to progress measures which are, in effect, a quantitative statement of how far a child has moved, educationally, within a given timeframe. What this means is that they are a proxy for denoting how much children have learned and how their skills have developed over a set period of time. In England, the effectiveness of a school was, in part, judged on the progress students made between KS2 and KS4 (see Table 6). The measurement was predicated on assessment in primary school and GCSE (and equivalent) results. For example, at the time of writing, successive governments measured all schools against the progress it expects children to make in English and mathematics between the end of KS2 and the end of KS4 (DfE, 2015c). The progress measures in English and mathematics were published for the first time in 2009. Until the most recent performance



measures were introduced, it was expected that children would make three levels of progress between KS2 to KS4. For instance, a child who achieved National Curriculum Level 4 (the expected Level) at age 11 was expected to gain a C grade in GCSE and children who achieved Level 5 at age 11 were expected to achieve a B at GCSE (Hutchings et al., 2016; DfE, 2015c).

**Table 6: KS2-KS4 progress measures**

		GCSE Grade									
		No KS4 result	U	G	F	E	D	C	B	A	A*
KS2 outcome	Working towards level 1	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made
	Level 1	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made
	Level 2	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made
	Level 3	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made
	Level 4	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made
	Level 5	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made
	Level 6	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made
	Disappled /Absent (TA)	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Not included	Not included	Not included	Not included	Not included	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made
	Left the school	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Not included	Not included	Not included	Not included	Not included	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made
	No TA or test	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Not included	Not included	Not included	Not included	Not included	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made
	Not eligible for tests	Expected progress not made	Expected progress not made	Not included	Not included	Not included	Not included	Not included	Expected progress made	Expected progress made	Expected progress made

Source: DfE, 2015c:2

As I set out earlier, in 2016 the Coalition introduced Attainment 8 and Progress 8. Progress 8 aimed to capture students' progress from the end of KS2 to the end of KS4 (DfE, 2015d; DfE, 2017g). It was in effect a value-added measure, as it rewarded schools with additional points in the performance tables for any increases in grades students achieved compared to the actual achievements of other pupils with the same prior attainment (ibid). By introducing this change, the government gave the impression that it would, in theory at least, place even greater emphasis on the progress children make in secondary school.

There are, however, several problems with progress measures and the prior attainment data they are predicated on which may affect Black children. First, prior attainment has been found to be a poor guide of a child's future potential (OECD, 2013). For example, there is research that suggests the progress of some ethnic groups accelerates at different Key Stages,

whilst for others it stalls (Cassen and Kingdon, 2007; Andrews et al., 2017), which does not appear to be taken into consideration when determining prior or future attainment. Second, at the time of writing KS2 assessments and, therefore, progress data, was heavily reliant on teacher assessments. This meant they were predicated on internal, as opposed to external marking arrangements that judged children's attainment (Standards and Testing Agency, 2016). This may have left Black children's results susceptible to the racial prejudice and discrimination (such as low expectations) that I have referred to throughout this thesis, which may result in lower levels than they may have otherwise achieved. This argument, however, does need to take into consideration that primary schools were being held to account to raise standards in similar ways to secondary schools, which means they were forced to 'balance their honesty and accuracy about an individual pupil with the school's need to meet threshold and floor standards' (Tidd, 2016.para.4). Third, progress measures do not account for children who have English as an additional language who make rapid progress once they master the language sufficiently to access the curriculum (Migration Observatory, 2016; DfE, 2017). Fourth, progress data has been used to excuse the underachievement of Black children (Gillborn, 2010; Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2013). Gillborn (2010:267), for example, argued that those who seek to explain away gaps in attainment do so by making the argument that Black children underachieve at KS4 because they have low prior attainment at KS2. He also contended that 'by controlling for "prior attainment" the statisticians effectively wipe the slate clean: any racist processes that shaped the kids' attainment up to that point disappear from sight' (ibid). This kind of argument is evident in the work of Strand (2014), who used quantitative methods to arrive at the conclusion, having controlled for a number of variables, that the poorest White British students, as opposed to their Black counterparts, were the lowest achieving large group and made the least progress.

One of the participants may have substantiated this argument when she said the following:

*Historically, I looked at all of the data and based on last year's results and the year before and what Ofsted classified as vulnerable groups such as gender, ethnicity, FSM and prior attainment, there is no one group that is underachieving (Ms Bishop, AHT).*

This suggests that Ms Bishop (AHT) arrived at the view that no groups of students were underachieving. However, her judgement was seemingly based on progress measures and targets that derived from this data. For example, she said the following:

*When I looked at the group that had not achieved their target grade, such as ethnicity, the make-up of the group was largely the make-up of the entire year group. The group was a microcosm of the year group (Ms Bishop, AHT).*

When she explained how she arrived at this judgement, she stated the following:

*My starting point was the data, so anyone who was forecasted for a C for English and a C for Maths was immediately put into our target group for five A\* to C with English and Maths (...). If you had one or the other you were not in the group. I also creamed off the top layer if you like so if you had a prediction of a B in English or Maths I put you into a gifted and talented programme. I understand fully that it was ten percent of the Year group. Essentially, I was saying you should not be near the danger zone. So I had a group which were in the middle. I then used the data to say whether they were on or off track based on the Year 10 summer mock results (Ms Bishop, AHT).*

The status afforded to prior attainment and progress data suggests that, for example, the racist experiences Black children are exposed to, which may negatively affect the levels they attain at KS2, could have had an impact on how they were judged at KS4. This is in the same way that, for instance, the advantage middle class children enjoy through their inherited cultural and material capital may have a positive impact on their educational success (Douglas, 1964; Goodman and Gregg, 2010; Hutchings et al., 2016). It appears, therefore, that the underachievement of Black children was explained away through the interpretation of progress measures.

CVA presented similar problems (Bradbury, 2011; DfE, 2017c). It made a judgement about the current attainment of, for example, Black children based on the attainment of this ethnic

group in previous years. Bradbury (2011:282) argued that CVA involved 'rewarding the status quo' as Black Caribbean children were expected to make less progress between Key Stages because they had negative coefficients:

CVA represents the promotion by the government of a system of monitoring schools which expects and condones differences in attainment by ethnicity. It functions as a legitimising framework for those educators who already link biographical data to particular positive or negative 'learner identities' (...). CVA only seems to encourage that process even more by accepting slower progress from some ethnic minority groups, and offering schools an explanation for this differential progress (Bradbury, 2011:289).

As I set out in the previous chapter, it is arguably the case that the performance matrix that denoted progress was all too often the principal tool in decision making, despite it being devoid of the necessary context required to recognise how Black children's prior experiences of discrimination may have inhibited their progress. For example, Gillborn (2010:272) argued that 'stats can't possibly capture the huge complexity of racism and how it works across so many unseen aspects of the world'. Consequently, it is at least arguably the case that, as a nation, we have no concept of Black children's ability, because the prior data cannot account for the negative impact of institutional racism on Black children's attainment up to the assessment points. For example, Rollock et al. (2015) found that low expectation amongst children existed even when prior attainment demonstrated high attainment. Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2013:607) argued that what is needed, therefore, is 'more engagement with data generation from the bottom up, which includes both quantitative and rich qualitative data'. They suggested that this data should be gathered from locals and LAs (as it would offer 'contextual specificity') then disaggregated (ibid).

Several scholars have argued that progress measures, as well as targets, have reinforced the deficit model of thinking (an approach I first drew attention to in chapter 2) that policy makers and others have failed to recognise as a problem (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000; Sewell,

2000; Rollock, 2007; Gillborn, 2010; Rollock et al., 2015;). Rollock (2007:285), for example, arrived at the following conclusion:

[W]hile staff express a desire to value all pupil achievement as a form of success, the realities and pressures of striving to meet Government targets in fact encourage the stratification of success in terms of an exclusive A\* to C grade success and an inclusive, lower grade success which also encompasses achievement in personal development. Different types of pupils are seen as having the necessary cultural capital to achieve in exclusive or inclusive terms. Pupils with special educational needs are disadvantaged, as are Black male pupils whose physicality and ethnicity not only magnify their presence in the school but also evoke fear in female members of staff, contributing to their increased surveillance and probability of staff–pupil tension and conflict.

Gillborn (2010) and Warmington et al. (2017) argued that underachievement is blamed on the child and absolves the education system of responsibility. Furthermore, Gillborn (2010:267) contended that the issues end up being a ‘problem with the kids – they’re “low attainers” – nothing to do with the system they’ve endured for years’. In addition, when data on education is produced, some academics, officials and teachers seek to, for example, manipulate the data in order to discount all but the most extreme inequality within the system (Gillborn, 2010). Furthermore, Apple (2000:19) stated the following, which is consistent with the depoliticisation of policy problems that I referred to earlier (Clarke, 2012):

Equality, no matter how limited or broadly conceived, has become redefined. No longer is it seen as linked to past group oppression and disadvantage. It is now simply a case of guaranteeing individual choice under the conditions of a "free market". Thus, the current emphasis on "excellence" (a word with multiple meanings and social uses) has shifted educational discourse so that underachievement once again increasingly is seen as largely the fault of the student (Apple, 2000:19).

An alternative explanation, which cannot be discounted, is that teachers failed to recognise or indeed consider the issues I have highlighted as a problem, as Black children were expected to underachieve. Graham and Robinson (2004:661) stated the following:

There is a common place racist understanding that surrounds the concept of ability, which is based on a historical and social construct of Black intellectual inferiority. This is located in the unspoken discourses that permeate educational institutions and continue[s] to inform popular beliefs and professional understandings. The focus on the concept of ability in educational policy is juxtaposed with individualism that serves to de-emphasize structured racialized positions and generate a shift towards blaming Black pupils for their situation, embracing one track solutions such as mentoring to assist “problem” Black pupils.

### **Data hegemony**

Many of these problems do not only concern the privileged position it appears that progress measures have been afforded but, as I referred to at several points in this chapter, the hegemonic status bequeathed to quantitative data in the school accountability regime and the education system more broadly. What I mean by this is that the data suggests that the participants and others considered it to be the case that decisions in government and schools were more informed (better, even) if they resulted from the analysis and interpretation of quantitative data (ibid). Gillborn (2010:266) found an identical school of thought in his research. He argued that it was not uncommon for the phrase ‘forensic use of statistics’ (ibid) to be used in relation to statistics in education. He contended that quantitative data was often treated as a special form of research (viewed as complex, objective and factual) that could reveal hidden realities about the world (Gillborn, 2010:266). He wrote, via a chronicle (a CRT method which uses fictional characters in order to articulate real situation), that ‘[t]hey see themselves like pathologists in TV dramas, unearthing what’s wrong with education by carving up their data into smaller and smaller pieces’ (Gillborn, 2010:266). In this thesis, the hegemonic status afforded to quantitative data resulted in targets and the headline measure and progress measures being a manifestation and validation of a school’s

performance and, more importantly, a child's potential (which had implications for the opportunities he or she was afforded).

### **Black children as valued assets**

Notwithstanding these fundamental issues, the data I have highlighted above may, however, explain why it is possible that some Black children benefited from the establishment of the school accountability regime and the quantitative performance data (such as progress measures) it gave rise to. What I mean by this is that it appears to be the case that, irrespective of their ethnicity, schools gave priority to those children who were able to meet the headline performance measures. They did so because it was in each school's interest to ensure that as many children as possible on its roll attained the headline measure. According to the progress matrix, the children most able to maximise such results were those who achieved level 4 at the end of KS2 (see Table 6). Consequently, it is possible that successive governments inadvertently deemed that all children with the right data profile (i.e. those that were capable of achieving the headline performance measure) should be prioritised by schools, because they could contribute to the school maximising their results.

It is arguably the case that this edict, which was ostensibly consistent with the colour-blind approach I described in chapter 2, ensured that, in such a high-stakes environment where the performance of schools was so critical, the Black children who, despite all the odds, had succeeded in achieving good results by the end KS2 (i.e. level 4s) were able to assist the school they attended in maximising its performance. Furthermore, it is possible to arrive at the conclusion that schools with significant numbers of Black children on their roll (which is the case in many schools in London), could ill afford to discount the children with the right data profile. Moreover, it may also be the case that, given the focus on the headline performance measure over and above all other data sets, senior leaders who operated in the most challenging circumstances, as well as those who aimed to exceed the expectations of government, may have sought to defy the data in order to reach the expected performance or surpass it. There is, for example, data that I will set out in the next chapter that suggests that senior leaders prioritised Black children who may have previously been considered

unable to meet the headline performance measure (i.e. those with a data profile of level 3 or below) in order to increase the school's performance. One may conclude, therefore, that defying the data was an emotional response because they believed there was what Fullan (2003:1) characterised as a 'moral imperative' to what they were doing, or it was a set of pragmatic actions taken because the status of the school (and indeed their jobs) were at risk.

In order to make sense of this, I want to return to arguments I made earlier in this thesis in relation to (a) self-interest and (b) the existence of an internal economy of student worth. First, in chapter 2, I argued that the work of Gillborn and Youdell (2000) established that an internal economy of student worth existed in which Black children held less value to schools than some of their counterparts. This was evident from the disproportionate number of Black children that were deemed incapable of assisting schools in maximising their performance against the headline performance measure and, therefore, were consigned to less privileged groups (ibid). Yet, the data set out in this chapter suggests that, in the economy of student worth, the value of some Black children to government and schools increased and, as a result, were subconsciously or consciously considered assets, because they had the potential to assist the school in performing favourably against the headline measure. These were the Black children with the right data profile (i.e. level 4s in KS2 assessments) who had gone from being deemed of little worth to being assets.

I have drawn the notion of Black children as assets from the work of Donner (2005), who applied the interest convergence principle to the study of African-American athletic students. He argued that, for the self-interest of colleges and universities, Black students were vocally supported by their institutions (i.e. by powerful and wealthy alumni and supporters) as they represented these organisations in sports competitions, but at the same time these establishment denied these Black athletes the opportunities to earn a degree that could advance their social and economic position (ibid).

With regard to the notion of self-interest, which I first referred to in chapter 2, I have argued that neoliberalism is predicated on enacting policies that champion the self-interest of actors operating in a competitive quasi-market. This manifested itself in, for example, the kind of



producer activism that I explained in chapter 3. In the case I have set out above, it appears that the efforts to raise the attainment of Black children were presented as neutral, objective and meritocratic (i.e. colour-blind) endeavours, but were in fact motivated by the need to maximise the institutional self-interests of successive governments and schools. Such endeavours should not, however, come as a surprise given that neoliberalism is aligned to the thought processes and policies of the private sector in which, for example, the somewhat distasteful colloquial phrase of 'sweating the assets', which involves making as much use as possible out of one's existing resources (Mazzawi, 2002:39; Workman, 2009:44), is a policy used in order to secure financial efficiencies and maximise profits (ibid). Yet, what is interesting about this case is that, as I inferred earlier in this thesis, institutional self-interest is a particular form of benefit, as those that pursue it are seeking to maximise gains for the state, which in turn is motivated by securing the interests of the powerful in society (Bell, 1980; Tate, 1997; Dudziak, 2000; Castagno and Lee, 2007).

### **The intervening state**

As I set out earlier, the enactment of neoliberal policies gave rise to performativity. This involved, amongst other processes, rewarding and sanctioning schools based on their performance. The data suggests that the school accountability regime mediated these processes. For example, targets and performance measures incentivised performance and, it appears, acted as the principle determinant for rewarding good performance and sanctioning underperformance. The data also suggests that sanctions came in the form of Ofsted judgements, but also direct intervention by central government. The participants and others claimed that this was a powerful tool, which was aligned to and its actions informed by the school accountability regime, for ensuring schools focused on raising standards and bringing in new providers who would do so and expelling those who were incapable or unwilling to focus on this priority.

It is possible that this activity worked to the advantage of some Black children. For example, successive governments developed a range of mechanisms for intervening in schools that were deemed to be underperforming. For instance, an underperforming school may have

been issued with a warning notice, which was a formal letter that raised concerns about a school's performance or the governing body of a school may have been changed [HC 735, 28 January 2015]. In addition, in exceptional circumstances a school may have been closed. The Coalition publicly identified three types of schools that it stated were subject to central government intervention (they remained unchanged at the time of writing): schools that were judged inadequate by Ofsted (for this kind of school an academy order would be issued requiring it to become a sponsored academy); schools that were coasting (for a school in this category that failed to produce a plan that was deemed sufficient to bring about improvement the relevant Regional School Commissioner, who were DfE officials, would use the powers of the Secretary of State to intervene); and schools that have failed to comply with a warning notice issued by local authorities and/or a Regional School Commissioner (RSC). These were not the only schools that central government were able to intervene in (see Table 7).

The data suggests that New Labour used a range of strategies when intervening in schools. Set out below are observations made by some of the participants:

*Cash [was used] as an incentive. It used to be a policy tool early in my years in the Department and now it's a bit more about trying to use the accountability regime to drive practice (Mrs Watson, CS).*

*London Challenge was there. The purpose was to drive up the achievement of the school in terms of its headline figures until it is, you know, no longer in any danger of underperforming (...). It was about getting students through examinations (Mr Parker, AHT).*

*When Blunkett and Michael Barber were in the Department there were some local authorities where failure was so ingrained that you needed to take functions outside of local authority control. You know the education trust in Hackney and there were other interventions in Leeds and Bradford (Mr Hammond, CS).*

*By the time I joined, I think Labour had sought of lost a taster for those big out-sourcing initiatives and had gone for more of the kind of, a bit like the equivalent of the super heads model (Mr Hammond, CS).*

#### **Table 7: Government powers of intervention**

These interventions are set out in sections 63-66 of the 2006 Act. They are the powers available to local authorities:

- Section 63 - power to require the governing body to enter into arrangements with a third-party organisation (such as an academy sponsor);
- Section 64 - power to appoint additional governors to the governing body of the school;
- Section 65 - power to appoint an interim executive board (IEB) to take over the management of a school.
- Section 66 – power to suspend the delegated budget of the school.

These interventions are set out in sections 66A-69 and 70C of the 2006 Act and section 4 of the Academies Act 2010. They are the powers available to the in Secretary of State:

- Section 66A – power to require governing body to enter into arrangements;
- Section 67 – power to appoint additional governors;
- Section 68 – power to direct closure of a school;
- Section 69 – power to appoint an interim executive board (IEB);
- Section 70C – power to take over responsibility for an IEB;
- Section 4 Academies Act – power<sup>23</sup> (or duty) to make an academy order.

**Source: DfE, 2015e**

This data suggests that New Labour developed several strategies for intervening in schools it considered to be failing. It may lead one to arrive at the view that central government intervention was considered a policy approach for addressing failure in the system. This view is consistent with the secondary data. The Coalition, for example, wrote the following:

Where schools are failing or seriously underperforming, it is vital that there is rapid intervention to address the problems as quickly as possible, so that children's education is affected as little as possible (DfE, 2015a:77).

Raising standards and narrowing gaps are the central goals of the Government's education policy. It is not our intention that the accountability system should be punitive or unfair to schools working in difficult circumstances but it must be able to identify and tackle cases of sustained underperformance (Michael Gove, cited in DfE, 2010.para.6).

### **School autonomy**

Some of the participants argued that, whilst there were subtle differences in the approaches adopted by successive governments, academisation (i.e. the expansion of the Academies programme I first referred to in chapter four) was invariably enacted as the principal policy for intervention. This view is consistent with scholarly work such as that of Hutchings et al. (2016).

One of the participants stated the following with regard to academies as an intervention tool:

*By the point I joined there was a shift to structural reform. The priority became establishing more academies, which was growing as a solution to failing schools (Mrs Watson, CS).*

She went on to state the following:

*For the bottom end of the school system, sort of characterising their approach I think they are just intolerant, just absolutely intolerant of failure, so it's a hard-core intervention regime. It's forceful take over. Placing the school with an academy chain, replacing governing bodies, which has been used tenfold more than with the previous government (Mrs Watson, CS).*

This view is consistent with what seems to have been the policy of successive governments that have favoured turning failing schools into Academies as opposed to new LA schools.

One of the participants appears to have suggested that Academies were intrinsically linked to the prioritisation of London.

*I think London Challenge made a difference (...) and I suspect in places like Hackney where most of the schools are Academies there has been an impact as schools that have never improved have been closed and re-opened as Academies (Mr Llywelyn, HT).*

This view is consistent with the argument made by Kidson and Norris (2014) who made the following observation:

Adonis kept a line of sight between the London Challenge and sponsored academies (formerly 'city academies'), in which the most persistently underperforming schools were closed and relaunched (sic) with new freedoms from local authorities and a non-government sponsor. Early academies were heavily concentrated on some of London's worst-performing boroughs (...). While it can be difficult to distinguish these policies from the core components of the London Challenge, their inclusion illustrates the way London Challenge was successfully embedded in the wider policy mix of the department (Kidson and Norris, 2014: 7).

In order to illustrate the close relationship between London and Academies, it is worth pointing out that, of the eighty-five schools that were originally targeted by London Challenge, by 2010 twenty had become Academies and four had closed (Ofsted, 2010:17). Indeed, it appears that it was always the intention of New Labour that academies were part of the policy solution to underachievement:

As part of this new, more diverse and innovative system, we want to see greater innovation in the provision of schools. New academies across London will be an important part of that (DfES, 2003:12).

## **The privatised school system**

It is arguably the case that the enactment of the Academies programme represented a classic neoliberal orientated response to the poor standard of education in London. One may arrive at the conclusion that it was considered a reaction to a form of market failure. What I mean by this is that the providers (i.e. schools in the Capital) were failing to offer the quality required so new, private providers were needed to enter the market. This is consistent with the argument I highlighted in chapter 3, in which I stated that neoliberalism contends that choice, competition and privatisation can improve public services (Le Grand, 1991, Cabinet Office, 2006). It appears that, for example, London Challenge was enacted in order to intervene and then strengthen the school market in London. This is consistent with a statement made in its London Challenge strategy document in which it explained that it sought to encourage LEAs to hold competitive processes for new schools (i.e. encourage various organisations to bid to open and run a school), in order to diversify the providers and models of schooling and, therefore, offer more choice for parents (DfES, 2003:43).

One may also contend that Academies were a part of the school autonomy programme that involved 'moves to devolve various aspects of decision making from regional and district officers to individual schools' (Whitty, 2008:3). As privatisation policies seek to do, this involved affording schools more freedom to make their own decisions. West et al. (2010:3) associated school autonomy, or what they referred to as 'decentralisation', with efforts to make the education system more 'efficient, responsive and accountable' (ibid). They argued that the ideas underpinning these policies are motivated by the belief that the 'redistribution of power to a school level will stimulate educational innovations designed to meet the needs of pupils, parents and employers' (ibid).

## **Academies and attainment**

There is insufficient space within this thesis to consider the strengths and limitations of Academies but, given that the data suggests they were an important part of the neoliberal agenda that was enacted in London by successive governments, I do want to set out the

evidence concerned with how Academies have been perceived in terms of the contribution they made to raising the attainment of Black children. None of the participants referred to the academies programme in relation to Black children specifically, but the secondary data suggests that a number of Ministers in the Coalition sought to not only claim that Academies assisted in raising the attainment of Black children, but it was an intention that they specifically did so. Michael Gove (SoS), for example, said the following:

And a crucial - and often-overlooked - fact is that academies are specifically benefitting those BME pupils who most need new educational opportunities.

Many academies have far higher levels of BME pupils than the rest of the state sector, both at primary and secondary (Gove, 2013.para.42-44).

He went on and appears to have claimed that the programme was advancing racial equality:

Sponsored academies have higher proportions of black children than other state schools - and black pupils' results are improving faster in those academies than in comparable LA maintained schools. That's why the academies programme is a major step forward for racial equality in this country (Gove, 2013.para.56-58).

John Nash (PUSoS), a Schools Minister in the Coalition and Conservative governments, made a similar claim:

For years black pupils' results have lagged behind their peers' but that gap is being eroded at all levels - the government's school reforms are helping thousands more black pupils, including the poorest, to do well at primary school (cited in DfE, 2014b.para.4).

It is particularly through sponsored academies, where long-term underperforming local-authority-run schools are being turned around by brilliant sponsors, that black pupils are benefiting. There are proportionately far more black pupils in academies

than in council schools, and the improving performance of black pupils is reflected in the improvements in academies (ibid).

These claims are, however, inconsistent with the research carried out by the Coalition, which presented a less positive picture. In its Equality Impact Assessment, which is a process it was legally required to do in order to judge and where necessary mitigate the impact of policies on minority groups, it wrote the following with regard to the proportion of Black children, between 2008 and 2009, attaining the headline performance measure:

For Black pupils the increase was 5.3 ppts in Academies, 4.4 ppts nationally and 5.9 ppts in the comparison schools (...). This is a complex picture and requires further investigation (DfE, 2011a:3).

It offered the following possible explanation before committing itself to doing further work to understand why this may be the case:

We know that results are improving relatively fast for deprived pupils and for boys in Academies (...), but we will undertake further analysis to break down the results for pupils from different ethnic backgrounds to understand why some of the groups above are not improving as fast as in the comparison schools. It may reflect the particular difficulties that Academies face in their local areas or it may reflect the different make up of the minority ethnic group categories, with Academies having higher concentrations of the groups of pupils that underperform throughout the whole system (ibid).

Whilst undertaking this thesis, I was not able to find the research the DfE committed itself to carrying out; neither was I able to find more recent data that compared the attainment of Black children in academies to comparable non-schools. This is, of course, an issue given that the analysis referred to above was undertaken some years ago, which brings into question the credibility of any conclusions reached (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). Yet, the data was produced within a reasonable timeframe of the comments set out above by Michael Gove



and John Nash, so it is possible to refute their claims based on this research. However, in comparisons made by the DfE (2015h) at the time of writing showed that 53.1% of all Black children educated in state funded schools achieved the headline measure in 2014 (51.8% in LA schools, compared to 59.4% in convertor Academies and 51.6% in sponsored academies). Clearly, these figures are not comparable to the research set out above that examine schools of similar characteristics in LA and Academies. What it does suggest, however, is that the performance of Black children in academies is not too dissimilar in contrast to the significant differences in performance Michael Gove (SoS) and John Nash (PUSoS) seem to have claimed.

It is also possible that Black children were disadvantaged by attending Academies as they have higher levels of permanent exclusions compared to other mainstream state funded schools (DfE, 2012). For example, given that Black Caribbean children are over three times more likely to be permanently excluded than the school population as a whole (DfE, 2017j), one may at least question whether the disproportionate number of this group educated in Academies exacerbated this problem. Further work would be required in order to establish a relationship between these two factors, particularly given that the DfE asserted that in an analysis comparing academies with LA schools with similar intakes the average permanent exclusion rate for academies was only slightly higher (DfE, 2012).

Whilst the participants did not make reference to Academies with regard to Black children specifically, they did offer some criticisms that are worth setting out as they give rise to one further issue that it is important to draw attention to. One of the participants, for example, said the following:

*Are Academies the saving grace? Some made big differences, but some have not made any improvement. Just because a school becomes an Academy does not mean you turn it around, it is not the solution (Mr Dyce, CS).*

Ian Austin, who was a member of the House of Commons Education Committee, made a similar point when he said the following at a meeting of the Committee:

I think there are good academies and poor academies, good maintained schools and poor maintained schools, and I think the structure is pretty much irrelevant but I am frustrated by the amount of debate in education at the moment and the priority from the Government on structural change (Cited in Parliament, 2016.Q24).

Michael Wilshaw (HMCI), who was a witness at the Committee, said the following in reply:

We are spending too much time on structure, and I speak as an ex-principal of an academy and an ex-head teacher of a local authority school. (...)The big issue for our system, if it is going to improve, is in an increasingly autonomous system (...). Do we have enough teachers in our system and are they good enough? Do we have enough leaders in our system and are they good enough? Do we have enough leaders who can run a number of schools well? That is a big challenge (ibid).

The variability in the performance of Academies is also evident in some of the data, which has found inconsistencies in performance (Gorard, 2005, 2014; Curtis et al., 2008; Hutchings et al., 2016; Francis and Hutchings, 2017).

These extracts suggest that one of the inherent problems with Academies as an intervention is that they failed to address the most significant problems that give rise to underachievement, which is a critical issue for consideration if, as Michael Gove (SOS) and John Nash (PUSoS) claimed, Academies were intended, and indeed contributed to, improving the attainment of Black children.

I want to offer an example that neither Ian Austin nor Michael Wilshaw (HMI) raised in their critiques, but is important to the issue of whether Academies represented an effective intervention for raising the attainment of Black children. This issue concerns the enactment of Academies, but also the neoliberal outlook more broadly. It is arguably the case that the market-orientated education reform programme enacted by successive governments led to a deficit, as opposed to an increase, in the influence afforded to external actors (such as

parents and community members, as well as community organisations). Yet, as Ball (2012:55) argued, 'some policies in schools can only be 'brought off' by including outsiders in the policy process'. This is an issue one of the participants raised in relation to racial diversity and her school:

*In the past the governorship, with more parent governors, has been a little more diverse, so there has perhaps been a little more challenge around, not so much underachievement but the diversity issues in the school (Ms Carrington, HT).*

It is possible that the enactment of the Academies programme led to fewer parents being involved in the oversight of schools. For example, E-ACT, which is a large academy chain, dissolved local governing bodies for its schools and replaced them with a central structure (Coughlan, 2016). Indeed, until the Referendum on the UK's continued membership of the European Union, the Conservative government proposed to end the requirement for elected parents to sit on governing bodies (DfE, 2016).

It is arguably the case that this is an illustration of the way in which education strategies that privileged institutional perspectives (i.e. those working inside the education system) may have had severe consequences for minority ethnic groups. For example, in their research into Black middle class parents' experiences of the school system, Rollock et al. (2011, 2015) concluded that Black parents were very concerned about the low expectations held of their children by schools simply because their children were Black. Yet, it is arguably the case that parents can play a crucial role in challenging a school on a matter such as this (a point alluded to by Ms Carrington). In addition to this, as I explained chapter 4, the data suggests that there are officials and senior leaders who do not recognise (let alone accept) the severity of the racial discrimination and underachievement experienced by Black children. Therefore, outside actors can play a crucial role in drawing attention to these issues. This is particularly important given that there are so few Black teachers (including senior leaders and Headteachers) working in schools to carry out this role (McNamara et al., 2009; Johnson and Campbell-Stephens, 2010; DfE, 2016, 2017d; Haque and Elliott, 2017). For example, whilst it is thought that Britain's first Black Headteacher (Tony O'Connor) was appointed in 1967

(TES, 2017), but in 2016 less than one percent of all Headteachers were Black and just over one percent of other Senior Leaders (i.e. Deputy Headteachers and Assistant Headteachers) were Black (DfE, 2017d). Furthermore, even where Black teachers are present, it has been found that the contributions they and their ethnic minority counterparts make have been side-lined in schools (see Ladson-Billings, 1998). Yet, despite research such as this, it is arguably the case that successive governments failed to give appropriate consideration to the negative impact neoliberal policies would have on the power and influence afforded to parents and other stakeholders, which potentially left them absent from discussions and strategies on policies concerned with raising the attainment of Black children.

This argument is consistent with research in this area. Gillborn and Warren (2003), for example, conducted an evaluation of race and education in Birmingham and found that ethnic minority communities were restricted in the degree of influence afforded to them to shape the debate on Black students' attainment. They concluded that, in discussions and strategies on how to improve the attainment of ethnic minority children, teachers' definitions of the problem were privileged. In addition, Ball et al. (2012, 2012a) argued that successful policy enactment in schools often requires the participation of outside actors, but these groups are omitted from the process.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have drawn attention to the data concerned with the school accountability regime and government intervention. It suggests that successive governments used the school accountability regime to define the standards they expected, the minimum level of performance schools were required to achieve and the priorities these institutions were compelled to focus on. The hegemonic status afforded to qualitative data was critical to this as it appears that the headline performance measures bequeathed to successive governments unprecedented power and control over schools. For example, as Baroutsis (2016:568) argued, 'test-accountability agendas encourage performativity', which result in schools focusing on simply 'maximising performance data and improving test scores'. This can be likened to what the journalist Simon Jenkins (2015.para.6) aptly refers to as 'the dictatorship of

number'. Yet, it is possible that the enactment of the school accountability regime worked to the advantage of some Black children (i.e. those with the right prior attainment data profile) as schools were compelled to prioritise their educational achievement. However, this policy also limited the opportunities available to Black children without the right data profile as they were deemed incapable of assisting schools in maximising their performance against the headline measures.

The data also suggests that successive governments enacted policies that bequeathed to them an increased powers to intervene in the schools they deemed to be underperforming. Whilst successive administrations devised a range of intervention policies, the data suggests that the Academies programme became the principle tool. This involved privatising underperforming schools (i.e. replacing providers that were either unwilling or incapable of raising standards to the appropriate level of performance). This was a powerful sanction that had the effect of forcing schools to focus on raising standards. For example, whilst the school accountability regime limited the opportunities available to the Black children without the right data profile because they were deemed incapable of assisting schools in maximising their performance against the headline measures, some schools were forced to defy the data (i.e. prioritise the attainment of children without the right data profile) in order to prevent government intervention for underperformance.

What this illustrates is that the enactment of a centralised school accountability regime, which was reinforced by government intervention, can be thought of as the manifestation of the 'free economy-strong state' (Gamble, 1979:5) ideology that is one of the central tenets of neoliberalism. What I mean by this is that, as I set out in chapter 3, whilst the approach adopted by successive governments in their endeavour to raise standards in London involved the enactment of policies that gave rise to more choice, competition and privatisation, they also maintained the neoliberal principle that it is legitimate for the state to intervene where it so chooses. A number of scholars have previously arrived at similar conclusions. Whitty (2008:166), for example, argued that, although the Conservatives actively sought to make schools more 'receptive to parents' wishes', they were unwilling to cede control over the outcomes that schools should achieve. In addition, Ball (2003:217)

stated it is a 'mis-recognition' to consider neoliberalism reforms as simply a strategy of de-regulation, as they are equally 'processes of re-regulation'. He contended that they are not 'the abandonment by the State of its controls but the establishment of a new form of control' (ibid). Jopling (2015) also arrived at a similar conclusion when he stated that, since the Coalition was formed in 2010, education policy has significantly increased school autonomy, but that academic research suggests that this policy has masked clandestine measures to concentrate power within central government, but not accountability.

In sum, in this chapter I have focused on the school accountability regime and government intervention strategies (which were used by successive administrations in order to compel schools to raise standards) and how these measures may have worked to the advantage of some Black children, whilst disadvantaging others. In the next chapter, I present the data which sets out the various ways in which schools responded to these measures and the effect they may have had on the attainment of Black children.

## 7. A Re-enactment of the Status Quo

It appears that my worst fears have been realized: We have made progress in everything yet nothing has changed.

Derrick Bell (1989:22)

### Introduction

In the previous chapter, I set out the data in relation to the school accountability regime and, as a result, argued that it was enacted by successive governments as a means of raising standards in London. I then arrived at the conclusion that some Black children in the Capital may have benefited from this regime (if only in terms of their attainment in GCSE examinations), whilst for others it entrenched the institutional racism they already experienced.

This chapter is concerned with the various ways in which schools in London responded to the policy pressures to raise standards. First, I set out the data with regard to the policies schools enacted in response to these pressures. Subsequently, I argue that schools enacted these policies in order to maximise their performance against the headline measure (i.e. they were motivated by institutional self-interest). I then conclude by revisiting one of the central arguments in this thesis (i.e. that the work successive government undertook in London to raise standards worked to the advantage of some Black children, but also further entrenched the institutional racial experienced by others) and argue that the data in this chapter represents further evidence in support of that view.

I want to begin by emphasising that public policy seldom instructs schools what to do nor does it dictate or determine specific, detailed actions. It does, however, narrow the responses available to schools (Ball et al, 2012), but also establishes expectations, 'exerts norming influence, and catalyzes shifts in how issues are framed' (Jimerson and Childs, 2017:584).

## Intervention programmes

Ball et al., (2012:145) argued that '[p]erformance and student behaviour is perhaps the 'master' discourse of schooling in the twenty-first century that drives policy enactment and takes precedence over everything else in our schools'. The data suggests that the enactment of intervention programmes (i.e. policies that involve providing specific students with altered and/or additional provision in order to assist them in meeting the headline performance measure) was emblematic of this. Below are observations made by two of the participants:

*Intervention should be a response to the fact that quality teaching has not worked. Every child should get that first and of the highest quality. But some interventions happen because we are trying to fill holes. Because a child did not get quality teaching the first time round (Mrs Ainsworth, DHT).*

*The whole school priority then, as now, was to try to get the girls to achieve the best they possibly could according to their potential. At that time the philosophy was that lots of hard work, lots of extra clubs, lots of help from teachers was the way to get the exam results up (Mr Parker, AHT).*

Some of the participants made reference to specific approaches their school had adopted:

*We've stolen our intervention model from PIXL<sup>26</sup> in all honesty and developed it so that it meets with our school. We set up KS4 motivation and intervention groups that run on two half termly cycles. Each person has three students that they meet with once a week. They have*

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<sup>26</sup> PiXL (Partners in Excellence) is a network of schools and other education establishments that, it contends, 'share a desire to raise standards and inspire young people to achieve excellence in their lives' (PiXL, 2015.para.2). It emerged from the London Challenge programme to 'further develop and widen the learning and success achieved in the capital's school improvement programme' (ibid). It states that its focus now is 'raising standards across Key Stage 2, GCSEs and A levels and to raise self-esteem, improve life chances and broaden progression' (PiXL, 2015.para.3).



*a positive academic report and they get scored based around their progress (...) (Mr O'Leary, AHT).*

*My school did not believe they could keep children interested in Year 11, so better to get them a C earlier in year 10. (...) They might do early morning sessions or after school. They may do weekends or away weekends; they may try different styles of teaching. So lots of different things. I'm guilty of doing these things but it's our expectations that these things should be done (Ms Maguire, DHT).*

*We have these very intensive drop days where we would pull in the C/D borderline kids and we'd hire a lecture hall in a different environment and work through stuff (Mr Connelly, HT).*

The data above adds further weight to the central argument that schools responded to the policy pressures in London by focusing on raising standards (in this case by devising a range of intervention strategies). There is academic research to support this view. Ball et al. (2012:152), for example, found that schools were expected to 'mobilise a set of targeted activities that will maximise student performance in the A–C range' (ibid).

One of the ways in which this may have manifested itself is on the negative effect raising standards had on improving children's knowledge and understanding. For instance, after reviewing some of the international research on external accountability regimes, Hutchings (2015) concluded that some studies have suggested that school effectiveness has had a positive impact on children's attainment in tests, but others have shown that it did not necessarily translate into an increase in children's knowledge and understanding, as children were just better at taking tests. However, some of the data in this thesis offers an alternative view. Mr Llewelyn (HT), for example, stated the following:

*If you suffer from any form of discrimination you've got to be able to prove that you have the qualifications. Schools have a moral obligation to understand that issue. The best way to deal with it is to contest the discrimination.*

In addition, Diane Abbott, a Member of Parliament representing a London constituency, alluded to this very point when she stated the following in the House of Commons in a debate on the introduction of the EBacc:

The Secretary of State will appreciate that I cannot speak about the detailed implementation of his reforms, but does he agree that an emphasis on rigorous qualifications and on obtaining core academic subjects is not, as is sometimes argued, contrary to the interests of working-class children and of black and minority ethnic children? On the contrary, precisely if someone is the first in their family to stay on past school leaving age, precisely if someone's family does not [have] social capital and precisely if someone does not have parents who can put in a word for them in a difficult job market, they need the assurance of rigorous qualifications and, if at all possible, core academic qualifications (HC Deb 11 June 2013).

These observations suggest that, in the current social and economic climate, the value of possessing qualifications far outweighs the mastery of its content. This leads one to arrive at the conclusion that, for Black children the benefits of holding certain qualifications (such as GCSEs) at a particular level, outweigh any mastery of the content. For example, given the discrimination Black people face in accessing employment and other such opportunities, it is arguably the case that being in possession of the most recognisable and highly thought of qualifications is of utmost importance to Black children if they are to even stand a chance of accessing such opportunities (particularly at the highest levels). Any ambiguities with regard to their ability to carry out a particular role (due to lacking the prerequisite qualifications) may simply legitimate the discrimination they experience.

### **Intervention groups**

The data suggest that schools prioritised specific students for intervention strategies. For example, set out below are observations made by some of the participants:

*I know a number of schools do interventions based purely on Year 11, but we decided it should be based on Key Stage 4 (Mr O'Leary, AHT).*

*I was given as my remit Key Stage 4. It was to raise the percentage of five A\* to Cs including English and Maths, but it wasn't about Key Stage 4 attainment as a whole, it was just that particular criteria (Ms Bishop, AHT).*

*What we've done, and we have only moved away from this recently, is waited until the mock exams of Year 11 to say oh my god this kid is not going to do it. So the current Director of Year 11 was saying "look at Year 10, look at Year 10" and no one batted an eye lid. Now I have been doing progress at Key Stage 4 I have a list for Year 10 (Mrs Akiloy, DHT).*

*No one cared about Year 7,8 and 9. Then in Year 10 and 11 everyone was on their case (Ms Baines, AHT).*

It appears that Michael Wilshaw (HMCI) confirmed this view in his critique of the approach many schools adopted towards KS3:

*In too many secondary schools, Key Stage 3 is not given the priority it deserves. Its status as the poor relation to other key stages is exemplified in the way many schools monitor and assess pupils' progress and in the way they allocate resources and timetable teachers (2016a.para.35).*

This is also evident from research carried out by Ofsted (2017:5), which argued that the status of Key Stage 3 was a 'poor relation to other key stages'. It found that, for example, staff were allocated to KS4 and KS5 before KS3, KS3 classes were often assigned to non-specialist teachers and assessment was the overall status of KS3 was lower.

Ms Carrington (HT), however, claimed it was the result of children's readiness to take part in such interventions:

*There's also a developmental trajectory. More young people realise, as they get older, that it makes a difference how hard you work and how committed you are to your studies so actually more and more of them join that march so it's worth putting more in because there's a greater capacity for it and there's a mini moral pathway saying they're ready for it now so of course you've got to do something about it.*

This data suggests that schools focused on children at KS4 (and Year 11 in particular). It may be the case that they chose to target this particular group because these students could have an immediate impact (positively or negatively) on their institution's performance. I will set out the relevance of this, but before doing so I want to draw attention to some of the data that suggests that within a Year 11 cohort, schools may have targeted particular groups of children for interventions. One of the participants, for example, stated the following:

*There are three drivers. Those young people who it is easiest to work with and make a difference to. Those young people that are identified as being close to a boundary and can be most successfully helped, simply because of a numerical judgement. They're a D, so we put them into a D/C group for intervention. There are then those young people who are the most disadvantaged for whom there also needs to be intervention; they're going to take something special; you're going to have to make it up for them because the D/C intervention won't work. It needs to be bespoke (Ms Carrington, HT).*

This extract also raises a number of issues that are emblematic of educational triage (Gillborn and Youdell (2000) and the economy of student worth (Ball et al., 2012) that I have referenced on several occasions. First, returning to an argument I set out earlier with regard to the de-prioritisation of Black children as an underachieving group, this data may explain why headteachers such as Ms Carrington (HT) made no reference to the underachievement of this group (i.e. she did not consider them to be a target group). She did, however, refer to disadvantaged children as being a priority for intervention strategies. As a result, it is possible to contend that the prioritisation of disadvantaged pupils, but not Black children is emblematic of the status successive governments afforded to these groups and, more importantly at this juncture, the inequitable priority schools responded by awarding to

them. Second, Ms Carrington (HT) referred to the children that were prioritised for intervention performing on the C/D borderline. This characterisation of performance (i.e. the C/D borderline) has been defined in several ways, but in essence it described the performance of a specific group of children who, based on assessment data, had the potential to attain the headline measure but were, at the time of measurement, at risk of underperforming. For example, a child might have been predicted to achieve grade C in four of five qualifying subjects, but a grade D in Maths (thereby on course to fail to attain the headline measure). They were, in effect, performing on the borderline between grades C and D. A number of participants also claimed that this group were a priority:

*The C/D borderline was the most important group. Whenever there was a conversation about data, the focus was on that group. So they were the ones who if they got them across the line our 5 A\* to C would look great (Mr Sandbrook, AHT).*

*The focus is on that borderline cohort of C/D and I think that has always been the case since the league tables. Schools were driven by these success measures (Mr Parker, AHT).*

*Students determine if they move into the target group. What was said to them was if your teachers start reporting you as a safe C you will move up. If your teachers say you're in the diamond group because you have a D in English and you don't have a prediction of a D, but you start getting Cs in English and you're close in Maths, I will put you in the Gold Group and get you some intervention for Maths. You choose. You have the agency. There is a conversation that will take place in the Core Group meeting (Ms Bishop (AHT).*

*The Maths target group and the English target group, which will become the general target group in most students' cases, are determined by the tracking, plus the professional knowledge of the heads of those departments and then it's all reviewed. The Head has her view, I have my view and so on (...). Of course, the composition of these groups changes, but because it tends to be based upon performance, they tend to be self-selecting. So anyone who is on a D in Maths who has the potential to get a C, off the FFT data, is going to be in that target group (Mr Parker, AHT).*

Some of the participants claimed that the prioritisation of children on the C/D borderline was either unfair or worked to the disadvantage of other children:

*It was all focused in the C/D borderline as they were the most important group. What were we doing for the E's and F's? No idea, but we were putting time and effort into these lot. The reason is that D is a failure for our headline measures (Mr Sandbrook, AHT).*

*There is a sense in which you can feel very uncomfortable because some of the things that you find yourself doing, which is if we are being honest you look at a group of students and you say ok we have a group of students here who are never going to achieve these important things for the school, therefore [Mr Parker makes what I interpret to be a gesture which means these girls are to some degree overlooked in terms of the school's efforts]. And energy gets expended, really if we're being honest, towards a group of students who have that possibility of getting somewhere and over achieving maybe, you know, doing better (Mr Parker, AHT).*

*As the school was very much focused on that borderline cohort of C/D, what you saw as the drop off in the number of A/B students and the E, F, G students being found alternative courses such as the ASDAN, a college course in life skills or mechanics. They just did a core number of GCSEs (Mr Connelly, HT).*

These kinds of practices were acknowledged and criticised by the Coalition (particularly given that they resulted in schools focusing on children on the C/D borderline). David Laws (MoS), for example, said the following:

Schools currently improve their league table position if pupils move over the C/D borderline. This gives schools a huge incentive to focus excessively on the small number of pupils around the 5 Cs borderline (Laws, 2013.para.3).

[The measure is] unfair to pupils with the potential to move from E grades to D grades, or from B grades to A grades. It is also, paradoxically, unfair to those on the C/D borderline because it leads schools to teach to the test (Laws, 2013.para.3)

Elizabeth Truss (PUSoS), who was also a DfE Minister in the Coalition, arrived at a similar view:

At the moment, secondary schools are judged by the proportion of pupils awarded 5 GCSEs at grade C or more. That created perverse incentives. We all know it encouraged disproportionate focus on moving pupils over the C/D borderline. It rewarded schools where pupils met the C grade targets, rather than excelled them (Trust, 2013).

Michael Wilshaw (HMCI) appeared to also be critical when he wrote the following in a monthly commentary:

[T]housands of pupils who achieved well at primary school, especially those from more disadvantaged backgrounds, were failing to reach their full potential after the age of 11. The reasons for this were the (...) disproportionate effort being spent in many schools on getting pupils over the GCSE D/C borderline rather than supporting the most able to secure the top A/A\* grades (Wilshaw, 2016.para.3-4).

Mrs Akiloy (DHT) seems to have attributed the prioritisation of children at KS4 (and Year 11 in particular) to the school accountability regime:

*Once there is always going to be targets, schools are always going to be forced to come in and do the booster sessions. What schools are going to have to do is get better at this and be brave and not put all the energy at Key Stage 4, but try to deal with it in Year 7 and Year 8, because if you spot underachievement and deal with it then by the time they get to Year 9, 10 and 11 you'll be alright.*

Several other participants made a similar point:

*There is a big issue there, the focus on the C/D borderline. If you start properly in KS3, students wouldn't be C/D borderline in KS4. If students were identified much earlier in Year 7, for example (Ms Baines, AHT).*

*The target groups were (...) free school meals, gifted and talented, but the key target group was the C/D borderline. That's nothing to do with background, just they could improve the school's A\* to C (Mr Sandbrook, AHT).*

*Those young people who are on the D/C borderline and those who are disadvantaged get taken forward more because they are externally judged. They are those young people who will make a difference to the headline figures and they are those who are most disadvantaged, because they may have a particular prominence because they are Pupil Premium (Ms Carrington, HT).*

Ms Carrington (HT) went on and appeared to claim that the school accountability regime forced schools into decisions (such as the allocation of resources) that maximised their performance:

*If you have limited resources you're putting it into Key Stage 4 and less into Key Stage 3, so it's that notion of finite choices. There's a pragmatism about it (...) that are driven by external judges, so there's the absolute importance of being judged by headline figures and the urgency of the future of the school and working to make it happen so that young people who come here in the future are not disadvantaged in any way inferior to a nearby school. So they have a right to come to a good school but that has to be judged by everybody to be a good school. The urgency is also obviously because the time gets less and less.*

It appears that these kinds of policies were enacted by schools in order to ensure their resources were targeted at the children that could make the most immediate, but also



significant difference to their performance. One of the participants alludes to this in his critique of such policies:

*I wanted to avoid quick fixes, if we go for top down improvements in schools, you get a lot of Year 11 and Year 6 fixes<sup>27</sup> (Mr Dyce, CS).*

The data in this section suggests that, as previous scholars have found and I have made reference to earlier, schools formed target groups in order to ensure their resources were targeted at the C/D borderline. It is arguably the case that this practice is a manifestation of a school effectiveness strategy (i.e. it was a means by which schools sought to maximise their performance against the headline measure). Indeed, it represents further evidence illustrating how exactly schools have responded to the policy pressures to raise standards and the influential role of neoliberal ideas such as deliverology (e.g. the connecting of learning to policy) and performativity (response to performance measures and targets). In addition to this, the data suggests that intervention groups have been enacted to bind the hands of classroom teachers so that they in turn focus on the children that can maximise results. As a result, schools 'exert pressure' to conform to the dominant policy agenda (Ball et al., 2012:150).

### **Progress grades and interventions**

The data suggests that schools made use of progress measures in order to determine their target groups.

*We work out who the target group are based on the students' Key Stage 2 data and maybe some baseline assessments. If you're roughly a 4c/4b you're going to be in the C/D borderline group when it comes to GCSE (Mr Sandbrook, AHT).*

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<sup>27</sup> Year 6 and Year 11 are the points at which children took the examinations that informed a school's performance in the accountability regime. To enact "fixes" presumes a school would focus attention and resources on some children in these year groups (educational triage being an example).

*There are going to be people who have a much smaller chance according to [the data] of getting it who maybe going to be in that target group as well if they have performed exponentially since Key Stage 2. So, you know it's all about the data really and the performance and a bit of gut judgement as well (Mr Parker, AHT).*

*It's a combination of prior attainment and the predictions made by staff that are used to make these decision (Mr Connelly, HT).*

The data set out above suggests that progress measures were used to predetermine the membership of target groups. What I mean by this is that it appears that KS2 data was used to predict the attainment of children at the end of KS4. In essence, the judgements made about children's ability at KS2 were fixed and then determined whether they would be in the target group, irrespective of their performance prior to that assessment period or at KS3. These decisions were, however, supplanted by the use of "gut judgement" (an issue I return to below). In the previous chapter, I set out the data that suggested that progress measures were an important part of the school accountability regime and arrived at the conclusion that they assisted successive governments and schools in excusing the underachievement of Black children. However, what is interesting about this data is that it appears progress measures were also a hindrance to all children attaining the headline measure but, arguably, Black children in particular. For example, as Sternberg (1998:18) argued that (a) 'tests of any kind tell us achieved levels of developing expertise' and (b) ability testing cannot tell us 'the asymptote a student can achieve' (ibid). He arrived at the following conclusion:

[H]uman abilities are forms of developing expertise. In a sense, then, tests of abilities are no different from conventional tests of achievement, teacher made tests administered in school (...). Although tests of abilities are used as predictors of these other kinds of performance, the temporal priority of their administration should not be confused with some kind of psychological priority. Abilities, as they are measured by these tests, are as much forms of developing expertise as are any other forms of developing expertise measured in whatever way.

In order to substantiate his view, Sternberg (1998:11) argued that it is often the case that the same forms of tests are used to judge achievement as well as make predictions about future achievement:

[V]erbal-analogies tests and mathematical problem-solving tests could be, and often are, used as predictors, but they could as well be predicted by other kinds of measures, such as school performance or other measures of achievement. Indeed, the murkiness of the distinction between abilities and achievement is shown by the fact that some of the types of items that appear as ability-test items (e.g., vocabulary) on one measure appear as achievement test items on another measure.

This is particularly relevant given that there is research that shows that children can outperform the progress expected of them. Cassen and Kingdon (2007), for example, found that 86% of all Indian children, who at age 11 were in the bottom ten percent for achievement, climbed out of that group by the age of sixteen and that thirteen percent climbed into the highest achievement category. This was in comparison to only 2.3 percent of White British children (ibid). In addition, in an analysis of the progress of economically disadvantaged children<sup>28</sup>, Andrews et al. (2017) found that Chinese children were the highest performing ethnic group at KS4 and made up a disproportionate amount of the top 25% of attainers, but were evenly spread through the attainment distribution at KS1 (even though they were above average). However, Black African children make more progress between KS1 and KS4, but Black Caribbean children fall back during their schooling (ibid).

It is at least possible that these differences in the progress children make can in part be explained by variable levels of expectations (i.e. there are high expectations of some ethnic groups but not others). Delgado (2001:2286) characterised this as the 'checkerboard of attitudes' (i.e. to hold views that favour one minority group whilst simultaneously devouring another). As I referred to earlier, this is described as the 'discourse of model minority' (Gillborn, 2008:146; Wong, 2015:731). Wong (2015), for example, argued that this

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<sup>28</sup> This report considered economically disadvantaged children to be those known to be eligible for FSM at any point in the previous six years.

discourse is used to recognise the educational achievements of some minority ethnic groups, as it 'categorises, evaluates, ranks and differentiates between groups'. Scholars have used this discourse in order to critique the way in which teachers ascribe higher status to Indian and Chinese children, for example (Archer and Francis, 2007; Gillborn, 2008). Therefore, it is possible that, without the appropriate context, the expectations of Black children are lower than, for example, Chinese children who make accelerated progress. Yet, as I referred to in the previous chapter, the context is critical. As Gillborn (2010:272) rightly argued, and I also referred to in the previous chapter, Black children's attainment cannot be separated from their 'racialized experience of schooling'. Other CRT scholars have also recognised how racism shapes the experiences of Black people. Edward Taylor (2016a:118), for instance, argued that Black people's lives are being 'continuously shaped, and limited, by racism' in areas such as education.

The notion of "*gut judgement*", which was a phrase used by Mr Parker (AHT), is also interesting. It suggests that some children stood a chance of being assigned to the target group even if they did not have the prerequisite attainment at KS2. One can only presume what the outcome of that may have been for Black children in his school. One possible result may have been that some Black children who may have otherwise been relegated to the less favourable cohorts may have been admitted to the target group (I referred to this earlier as schools defying the data). However, given the overwhelming evidence on labelling, low expectations, model minorities, educational triage etc. (a very small proportion of which I have presented in this thesis), it is arguably the case that the use of "*gut judgement*" may have worked to the advantage of some ethnic groups (possibly a low prior attaining Chinese children, for example, or so-called White Working Class children, who were a priority under successive governments), but to the disadvantage of Black children.

### **The benefits of intervention**

Mrs Akiloy appears to claim that her school used the management tool of red, amber and green to denote how the school judges how close children were to, and indeed far away from, attaining the headline measure. She then stated that the school seeks to move all of it

students to the position where they are judged to be on course to attain the headline measure:

*My job is to look at the department lists and the school list and look at those students who are bankers and then look at those who might get it. We RAG the students and we try to move students to green. The departments then do what they need to do to get them to green (...)*  
(Mrs Akiloy, DHT).

Earlier, Mrs Akiloy (DHT) and Ms Bishop (AHT) referred to children being placed into groups. For example, Mrs Akiloy appears to refer to two separate groups of children in her school. She described the first group as “bankers”, whilst the second were “those who might get it”. She goes on and seems to suggest that her school focused on the latter group of children (i.e. those who are at risk of failing to meet the headline measure). In addition, Ms Bishop (AHT) claimed that children in her school were moved into a target group based on their performance. A number of other participants also referred to their schools separating children into groups. They often described these as the “target group,” as Ms Bishop (AHT) did, or the “intervention group”. The participants claimed that there are benefits associated with being a member of one of these groups, as opposed to not, as they receive additional resources (monetary and otherwise) from their membership. For example, one of the participants said the following:

*It makes a massive difference being in the target group. As an example, five of you are taken off and supported (...). I guess that is where you want to be because if you have not had it it's unfair* (Mrs Ainsworth, DHT).

Mr Wilson (AHT) offered some specific benefits:

*I suppose that you do get two advantages from being in there. One is that you get that belief and commitment from the school staff that a group of students or a student who is not in the target group is not guaranteed to get. They may get it, but they might not. They won't be made to feel special in the same way. There is not a fantastic difference, but at some point they*

*are more likely to be ignored to a certain extent. The other advantage is that you're more likely to achieve particular grades and you can use those qualifications later on if you wish to make particular choices about what you need to do with your life that someone that is not in the target group may not.*

Another of the participants said the following:

*The kids do well from intervention, but if you turn up for almost one to one tuition with a teacher for eight weeks it should make a difference to your grade so those kids do well (Mr Sandbrook, AHT).*

Ms Bishop (AHT) appears to suggest that children in target groups receive additional support that children would otherwise not receive:

*There has been a culture of if you predicted sixty percent and you got eighty everybody loved you. Whereas now, if you did the same, that's twenty percent of kids that did not get interventions in other subjects who should have because you didn't forecast accurately.*

Mr Wilson (AHT) offered the following observation from the child's perspective:

*The problem, I guess, is that we don't actually know for sure whether students go through Key Stage 4, or the whole of the time, feeling like they have been neglected or not being picked up if they are not in the target group.*

The participants claimed that it was possible for children to enter and exit a target group. For example, one of the participants said the following:

*We also look at what they are like at the end of Key Stage 3, so if your levels are higher you could go into the benchmark group (...) we will do that. We don't find that there are many (Mrs Akiloy, DHT).*

Mr Wilson (AHT) also confirmed that there is movement into the group:

*The first big movement of students in the target group is after their results at the end of Year 10. We will have a look at performance there and we will move students in but we won't move any students out at that moment. During Year 11 I meet quite often with the heads of English and Maths and we talk about the students together and we begin to make suggestions. So for example if a child has got TMGs [target minimum grades] in English and maths but, for example, they got a C in the November Maths exam, we do talk about the student in terms of their English and whether we can move them into the target group for their English and how realistic that is as a prospect.*

Mr Wilson (AHT) claimed that students were also removed from the target group:

*I do think it is from the top down (...) from the [Headteacher] down that there is that view that all the children can achieve and that we need to be working at that all of the time and not really ever to give up. But having said that sometimes we do give up on some students because of their behaviour primarily and it's quite interesting how quickly they disappear from the place.*

Some of the participants claimed that once the target group had been identified, schools used a generic (rather than targeted) approach in terms of the interventions they deployed. For example, Mr Parker (AHT) said the following:

*I think there is probably more work to be done on understanding what are the right interventions. It tends to be a fairly blanket approach. You're a student in this target group, therefore what you need is this.*

Mrs Akiloy (DHT) made a similar point:

*[We] apply a brush stroke. We don't actually go back and work out what the individual is struggling with, we have a brush stroke approach and then the school just goes into the borderline C mode.*

According to one of the participants, the consequence of this kind of approach is that it leads to an unfair distribution of resources:

*We plough so much money into Year 11 at the expense of other year groups in the school. Year 7 is neglected and all the focus is on Year 11 (Ms Baines, AHT).*

Yet, Mrs Ainsworth (DHT) claimed that if these interventions were not targeted and structured appropriately that they end up being ineffective:

*Unless interventions are something unique to you, it's not going to help. If you had it and did not need it, it would not improve our results.*

This data suggests that schools prioritised a very specific group of children for intervention strategies. It appears that they were children at KS4 (Year 11 in particular) who were primarily on the C/D borderline. Schools organised these children into target groups, in order to ensure they received additional focus and resources and, therefore, stood the very best chance of attaining the headline performance measure. Indeed, membership of the target group acted as a glass floor, protecting children from failure. Consequently, it appears that membership of a target group afforded children priority status. As I explained in chapter 3, these kinds of policies are not new, as they were identified by Gillborn and Youdell (2000:133) as a form of 'educational triage'. In addition, Wilson et al. (2006) argued that school resources are re-allocated to target children at the C/D borderline and Reback (2008) argued that schools in the US might shift resources in response to accountability incentives, which means that students who are close to the margin (i.e. those whose performance is crucial to the school's performance) receive added focus. Therefore, based on the data in this study, as well as the existing scholarly research, it is arguably the case that (a) target groups have acted as a catalyst for additional resources when required and a safety



net that worked to ensure the performance of specific children would not fall below a certain level and (b) schools have enacted such policies in response to the pressure placed on them by successive governments to improve their performance against the headline measure and that the actions they have taken have been entirely focused on maximising their performance.

It is arguably the case that policies such as these may have worked to the advantage of some Black children (i.e. those with the right data profile). For example, the data in this chapter shows that children in target groups receive significant resources (therefore Black children assigned to these groups may have benefited from being in a target group as their counterparts have too). In addition, it is possible that the pressure placed on schools to improve their performance against the headline measure and the hegemonic status afforded to quantitative data may have increased the opportunities available to Black children with the right data profile to acquire membership of such groups than they would have traditionally. What I mean by this is that prior to the prioritisation of London, it is arguably the case that the racist attitudes of some teachers would have been allowed to routinely influence the decisions taken about Black children's education (see, for example, Coard, 2005; Foster, 1990; Gillborn and Youdell, 2000; Gillborn, 2002 & Mirza, 1992). However, it may be the case that neoliberalism, and the prioritisation of London in particular, ensured such decisions were filtered through the prism of institutional self-interest. This meant that if the success of a Black child was judged to be beneficial to the school's performance, those negative judgements were afforded limited influence.

It may be helpful to offer an example. As I made reference to in chapter 3, Foster (1990) and Gillborn and Youdell (2000) found that the negative stereotyping of Black children resulted in them being disproportionately placed in lower sets and streams, but the data in this section suggests that, by deploying the colour-blind approach, Black children were, unintentionally, prioritised if they were capable of assisting the school in meeting the headline performance measure.

There are, however, a number of problems with the kinds of policies set out in the data above, which is not surprising given that, as Parker (2003: 189) argued, '[r]acism and prejudice are embedded in the simple psychological decision-making rules that we use to make inferences and draw conclusions about groups'. For example, some scholars have rightly argued that policies such as these work to the disadvantage of those children who are denied the opportunity to participate in target groups, either because their performance is higher or lower than those on the C/D borderline (see, for example Ball et al., 2012; Gillborn and Youdell, 2000). Incidentally, the Coalition argued that the enactment of Progress 8 was in part motivated by the desire to end policies that focused on children on this borderline at the expense of others (Laws, 2013). Yet, despite the changes to the accountability regime, there is evidence to suggest that they have done little to disrupt the status quo. For example, in a survey undertaken by Ofsted (2015), over half of the respondents said that the new accountability measure had not affected their Key Stage 3 offer. What is more, it is arguably the case that many of the policies which involve the prioritisation of some groups of children at the expense of others will persist given that, for example, as a part of the new performance matrix schools are also being judged on attainment in the relation to the EBacc and the percentage of children attaining both English language and Mathematics (as opposed to progress measures). This means that very specific attainment measures will continue to be important and, therefore, may reproduce the kinds of policies set out in this chapter.

In addition, these policies may entrench the institutional racism Black children already experience. For example, the evidence above suggests that data is used to inform decisions on membership of target groups, but these processes seem to be less systematic in relation to excluding existing members from these groups. Even the barometer of "*gut judgement*" that Mr Parker claimed was used in his school to admit some children (this data was set out earlier) to the target group, seems to be a much more decisive tool in excluding children. This is illustrated by, for example, Mr Wilson's (AHT) account in which he claimed that a child could be removed from a target group in his school due to poor behaviour, as opposed to their performance (which is used to judge entrance to these groups). Without appropriate safeguards, such practices may give rise to concerns in relation to race equality, given the

scholarly work I drew attention to with regard to some teachers' negative stereotyping of Black children in relation to behaviour and the harsher disciplinary measures they implement (Wright, 1985; Mac an Ghail, 1988; Gillborn, 1990; Osler, 2001; Major, 2003; DfES, 2006a). What I mean by this is that the Black children afforded membership of a target group are still susceptible to the racist attitudes and values of some teachers which could subsequently result in them being excluded because of racism. Indeed, it is at least arguably the case that any policies or practices that are enacted in relation to attainment that are predicated on teachers' judgements of behaviour are, given the findings of scholarly work in this area, concerning.

### **Gaming the system**

Some of the data set out earlier in this chapter suggests policies such as the school accountability regime have created an environment in which schools are conflicted, as they have sought to balance the needs of the child and those of the school. The former Chairman of the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference, Bernard Trafford, described an environment in which schools were being forced into 'going for points rather than the best options for the children we teach' (Trafford, 2016.para.9). Some of the participants claimed that not only had this led to schools focusing on a narrow group of students, it had also given rise to the enactment of a number of other policies which could be considered inconsistent with the rules governing the accountability regime. For example, one of the participants said the following:

*Headteachers do the best for their kids, but there are the ones who play the game (Mr Carmichael, CS).*

This was a view also shared by some of the senior leaders:

*Senior teams band around these figures as if that's all it's about. Even if we frame it that it's what's right for the student, I'm not always convinced by that, but maybe I'm a bit cynical about these things (Mr Sandbrook, AHT).*

The notion that Headteachers *play the game* was a phrase used by a number of the participants and others:

*There is that pressure to the point at which getting the 5 A\* to C [including English and Mathematics] has become gaming. (...) It's doing everything you can to get the kids the best results possible which might not have anything to do with their learning (Mr Llywelyn, HT).*

*Schools have to play the game (...). The game is the getting 5 A\* to C game. It's the Ofsted grade. It's the game that commonly interpreted how does the media and society decide your school is a success. It's those couple of measures. Yes, schools have reputations, but if you're moving to a new area and you ask what the local school is like and it's outstanding ranking and its 5A\* to C is eighty five [percent], you would assume it's a good school. Even if the students are taught like battery hens you'd assume it's a good school (Mr Sandbrook, AHT).*

The final point made by Mr Sandbrook (AHT), with regard to teaching children like battery hens, is consistent with the descriptions of other participants. It was often referred to as *gaming the system*. The participants offered a range of examples. Ms Baines (AHT) stated the following:

*Putting schools in a league table does not improve schools, as the figures can be manipulated. Students disappear off role during Year 11, so schools massage and manipulate the system.*

Ms Baines appears to suggest that schools remove children from their roll for institutional self-interest (in this instance to improve their performance against the headline measure). It appears that Amanda Spielman, who is at the time of writing HMCI at Ofsted, shared this view when she stated the following:

[W]e know that there are some schools that are (...) moving out pupils who would drag down results. That is nothing short of a scandal where it happens (Spielman, 2017.para.57).

Off-rolling is in some ways an even more extreme and invidious example of where some schools have lost sight of the purpose of education, which should always be to give children the support that they deserve (Spielman, 2017s.para.61).

In addition, Nicky Morgan (SoS) stated the following:

We will not tolerate a situation where we effectively give up on a whole group of young people and where alternative provision becomes a dumping ground (Morgan, 2016.para.13-14).

These policies are widely referred to as off-rolling, which involves school directing specific children to attend off-site Alternative Provision (AP)<sup>29</sup>, full-time or part-time, in order to assist them in improving his or her behaviour or for issues such as illness (DfE, 2013b; Gill, 2017). Off-rolling can also involve illegal practices. For example, Gill (2017) stated that schools have been found to remove the names of children from their register once they have been directed to attend AP. In addition, schools could encourage parents to take their child out of school, which is also illegal (ibid). There is research to support the claim that schools off-roll children in order to improve their performance (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2012; Thomson, 2016a; Gill, 2017; Nye, 2017; Ofsted, 2017a). Nye (2017), for example, found that, in 2014/15, there were 4,790 formal permanent exclusions in England, yet approximately 32,000 children a year leave the rolls of mainstream state secondary schools and for the year group who finished secondary education in 2014/15 there were approximately 87,000 moves during this cohort's period at secondary school. Many of these

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<sup>29</sup> In this context AP refers to education outside school that is commissioned by local authorities or schools (i.e. provision that children participate in that is not led by school staff and is separate from their regular timetable and school site or a pupil referral unit) (Ofsted, 2011; Taylor, 2012; Gill, 2017).

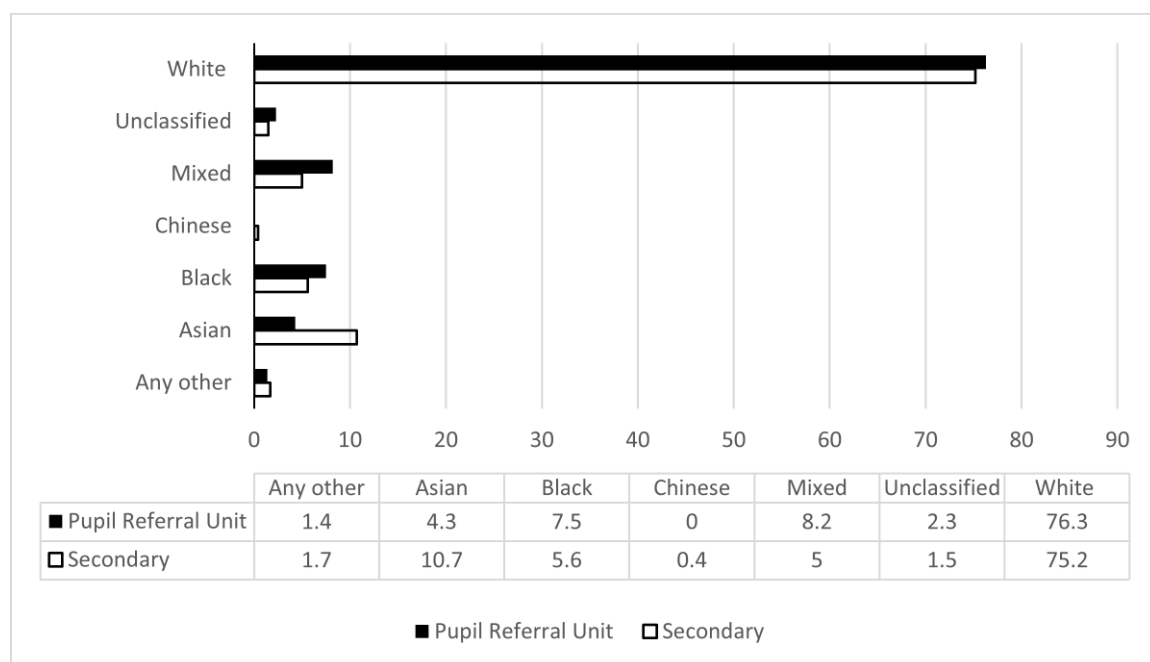
children were being directed to attend Alternative Provision<sup>30</sup>. He concluded that, in some cases, 'pupils are being 'managed out' of mainstream schools before this point with the effect of boosting the league table performance of the school which the pupil leaves' (Nye, 2017.para.5). In addition, the number of children transferring to the independent sector from state-funded mainstream schools after January of Year 10 has increased over recent years, from under 400 in 2004 to over 1,000 in 2015 (the actual number is likely to be higher) (Thomson, 2016a). It is possible that these transfers also take place in order to maximise results (ibid).

There is also evidence to suggest that such policies worked to the disadvantage of the children involved. For example, experimental statistics show that only 1.4 per cent of children in AP achieved the headline performance measure in 2009/10 (DfE, 2011) and children in AP are twice as likely to be taught by an unqualified teacher and twice as likely to have a supply teacher (Gill, 2017). In addition to this, in a small sample, Ofsted (2016) found some evidence of children's KS4 targets being adjusted downwards at their point of entry to AP and, as opposed to measuring educational progress and attainment, in some case feedback from an AP provider of good behaviour, improved motivation and engagement, or a readiness to return to mainstream education were considered by some schools or providers as a reliable indicator of a child making good progress in their placement (ibid). Furthermore, in its sample it found that approximately one fifth attained of children gained a grade A\* to C in one or both of these English and Maths GCSEs. Indeed, the Conservative government wrote the following in one of its White Papers:

By every objective measure, pupils who have spent time in alternative provision (AP) do considerably worse than their peers. Very few achieve the qualifications that will help them succeed in adult life and they are considerably more likely to become NEET (not in education, employment, or training) (DfE, 2016:102).

This data suggests that gaming involves enacting policies that are inconsistent with the spirit of the rules that govern the accountability regime. Indeed. What is significant about this is that, whilst there is no reliable data on the number of children in AP (Taylor, 2012; Gill, 2017)<sup>31</sup> there is evidence to suggest that the power to direct children to AP and PRUs is a policy that may disproportionately affect Black children. For example, Black Caribbean children are nearly four times more likely to be educated in a PRU (see Figure 10 for data on secondary schools) (Bhattacharyya et al., 2003; DfE, 2017b; Gill, 2017).

**Figure 10: Percentage of pupils by ethnic origin in state-funded secondary schools and Pupil Referral Units in England, 2017**



Source: DfE, 2017b

In addition, in a survey carried out by Ofsted (2011), approximately a third of children in some AP centres had received a Fixed Term Exclusion (FTE) from a school or unit. Given that Black children are more likely to be excluded from school, it is possible to surmise that

<sup>31</sup> Gill (2017:15) argued that there is a 'serious underestimation of exclusions data' and that 48,000 children are being educated in AP for excluded students, which 5 times the yearly official exclusion data.

they are over represented in this cohort, too. See Table 8 for further information in relation to progress and attainment.

**Table 8: Progress and attainment in Alternative Provision, 2016**

	A*-C in English and maths GCSEs			English Baccalaureate		Average Progress 8 score	% of pupils who achieved 5+ A*-C grades inc. English and mathematics GCSEs
	Average Attainment 8 score	% of pupils entered for components	% of pupils who achieved	% of pupils entered for all components	% of pupils who achieved?		
All schools	48.5	91.1	59.3	36.8	23.1	-0.03	53.5
AP	7.8	42.0	3.4	0.2	0.1	-3.28	1.1

Source: DfE, 2017g

Therefore, this may lead one to at least question whether a disproportionate number of Black children are subjected to, or are disadvantaged by, policies such as off-rolling and, as a result, are locked out of the opportunity to achieve the headline measure. Indeed, Dunning-Lozano (2016) inferred that alternative education may have the hidden function of preserving whiteness.

This example (i.e. off-rolling) suggests that some schools have gone as far as to enact policies that seek to subvert the rules governing the school accountability regime. This data is consistent with the scholarly work of Ball (2012:528) who found that the policies enacted by schools in their study were dominated by the focus to ‘drive up, by any means possible, the test and exam, performance of pupils and schools in relation to national benchmarks’ and that teachers find it difficult to establish a ‘clear ethical position’ in relation to such policies. As a result, one may conclude that gaming the system was, as some commentators have made reference to, a form of corruption (de la Bédoyère, 2015). Furthermore, one may content that this morally corrupted regime was the unintended consequence of the neoliberal policy agenda that the data and research in this thesis suggests has put pressure on schools to perform.



## Exam entry policies

The manipulation of examination entries was another means by which some schools were found to be gaming the system. For example, Ofsted (2017b:5) claimed that some schools were entering students for similar subjects administered by different exam boards in order to maximise their results. However, the most salient example of gaming the system through examination entries that the participants referred to was what one may describe as equivalency policies. The extent to which these policies were enacted by schools, and the effect they had on the headline measure, decreased when the Coalition government changed the accountability measures. However, they were in operation for a substantial period during the time this thesis is concerned with (certainly up until 2011 when the Coalition commissioned Alison Wolf (2011) to examine these policies). These measures involved schools entering children for vocational courses that had equivalent value in performance tables as one or more GCSEs because they were deemed easier to achieve. For example, one of the participants claimed that the expansion of vocational qualifications by New Labour was intended to make the headline measures more inclusive:

*The whole development around vocational and other qualifications under Labour I feel was about them saying we want everybody to do really well at GCSE (Mr Fitzgerald, AHT and CS).*

However, some of the participants appeared to reject this view by claiming that the decision taken by New Labour to grant a range of vocational courses with equivalent status was exploited by schools as these qualifications were easier. For example, one of the participants made the following observation:

*Some qualifications were so easy; I mean criminally easy (Mr Connelly, HT).*

Ms Bishop (AHT) seems to make a similar point and argued that the misuse of these courses may explain some of the improvements in the headline measure:

*There was an element of game playing that went on around five A\* to Cs and equivalence (...). There has been a significant amount of scepticism about those rising figures from certain other schools. I think there is a perception that schools that have radically improved have either just caught up with what we were already doing or have started involving equivalency courses in a game we don't believe is worth playing.*

Ms Maguire (DHT) appears to hold a similar view and claimed that equivalency policies are enacted for institutional self-interest:

*I think it is really important to put children first. Putting a child through a qualification to bump up a school's 5 GCSEs including English and Maths is not a good reason. The question should be whether it will be useful to the child.*

Mr Wilson (AHT) put forward a similar point:

*I do think that there was a certain amount of fantasyland in putting kids through lots of vocational qualifications. Again, it was about assessment rather than learning.*

Mr Dyce (CS) claimed equivalency policies were enacted in a number of schools in London:

*When I talked to schools in London Challenge about their processes to get a child to grade C (...), some used the BTEC option.*

The data set out above confirms that equivalency policies were used by some schools to improve their performance against the headline measure. However, many of the participants were at best uneasy about this approach. For example, one of the participants questioned the impact of equivalency policies on the provision available to children:

*Our school prides itself on a broad and balanced [curriculum] and would never bring in many of the equivalencies that as a teacher one might suggest may not be equivalent to GCSEs (...) I think there must be some school somewhere doing four days of English and*

*Maths with their kids and an [equivalency day] where you get three others (Ms Bishop, AHT).*

Ms Maguire (DHT) also claimed that vocational provision worked to the disadvantage of children in later life:

*I think it has been wrong to say to children that you can do ICT worth four GCSEs. Clearly it isn't equivalent to four GCSEs (...) it's clearly a lie (...). What employer is going to say, oh great you have functional skills? They are going to want to know if you have GCSEs in English and maths, because that's what they have. So, again, it's about Headteachers saying this is the right game for students.*

With regard to the impact equivalency policies had on schools' performance against the headline measure, some of the participants questioned whether it was right to afford many of the vocational qualifications equivalency status:

*On occasions it has been a disservice to children who are able to go: yes I've got five Cs, and they are made up of dubious things (Ms Bishop, AHT).*

Ms Bishop (AHT) also went on to say the following:

*I think that equivalencies have done a terrible disservice to overall figures. Five A\* to Cs and five A\* to Gs. That's why everybody within the world of education looks at the benchmark because that's where the interesting work has happened.*

Mr Dyce (CS) claimed that the Coalition was also sceptical about the value of vocational courses (particularly those afforded equivalency status):

*How comfortable schools are with vocational courses I don't know. The Coalition government is less enthused than the previous government.*

This view is confirmed by Michael Gove (SoS), Nicky Morgan (SoS):

Far too many 14-16 year olds are doing courses with little or no value because performance tables incentivise schools to offer these inadequate qualifications (Michael Gove, cited in Wolf, 2011:4).

Instead of taking these core academic subjects thousands of pupils were pushed to take so called “equivalents” - poor quality vocational qualifications, many of which counted for nothing when it came to progressing to post-16 education or training (Nicky Morgan, cited in DfE, 2015f:4).

In addition, Nic Dakin, who was a member of the House of Commons Education Committee, said the following:

One of my observations is that over the last few years, there has been what I would call a BTEC-isation of the curriculum, (...) what it appears to have done is to have driven up outcomes for young people at 16, on the back of which GCSE maths and English have pursued that five A\* to C indicator (Cited in Parliament. House of Commons, 2011.Q33).

Much of the data set out above appears to place the responsibility for gaming the system on schools. However, Graham Stuart (Ch.HoCEC) seems to blame successive governments for their existence. For example, in challenging the Coalition government’s policies, he argued that the headline performance measure was the source of the problem:

The last Government had the floor; the last Government put in five good GCSEs, and the last Government saw us drop down PISA comparison tables (...). Yet your response is to reinforce the focus on that anchor measure. In fact, to show additional machismo and commitment, it is to raise the floor higher at the same time as making it harder to get there, thus pressuring schools even more to game the system (...). (Graham Stuart, cited in Parliament. House of Commons, 2012.para.36).

Michael Gove (SoS) appears to have accepted this critique, but argued that it is an inevitable outcome of the enactment of any accountability system that involves the setting of targets and performance measures:

We all know that whenever you have any measurement that is then used as an accountability measurement -in effect, a target- there is always a temptation to game the system (Cited in Parliament. House of Commons, 2012.para.4).

However, Michael Gove (SoS) claimed that it would be wrong to overemphasise the extent of the problem:

While we want to tackle gaming and make sure that we tackle perverse incentives in the system, let us not assume that the behaviour of all teachers and all headteachers is driven only by external accountability factors (Michael Gove, cited in Parliament. House of Commons, 2012.para.43).

The data concerned with gaming the system gives rise to two issues. First, it illustrates that schools went to extreme lengths (including subverting the rules governing the school accountability regime) in order to improve their performance against the headline measures. What I mean by this is that the pressure placed on schools by successive governments (in the form of neoliberalism) forced these institutions to internalise particular forms of behaviour that seems to have included the enactment of morally corrupt policies (ibid). Second, this data appears to confirm that the enactment of these policies was driven by institutional self-interest (i.e. to maximise performance against the headline measures), which was an argument I first made in chapter 2.

One must, of course, consider both the potential benefits and limitations that gaming the system had on the attainment of Black children. For example, notwithstanding the moral corruption and institutional self-interest that drove this activity, it is possible to judge from a pragmatic perspective that these policies worked to the advantage of some children in

London (including Black children), as they ensured schools focused on raising standards and, as a result, may have led to more children attaining the headline measures. It is possible that, for example, these policies were enacted in order to defy the data which, as I referred to in the previous chapter, may have offered Black children without the right data profile the opportunities they were often denied.

It is also the case, however, that gaming the system worked to the disadvantage of some children from all ethnic groups. There is, for example, evidence above which gives rise to the view that children were entered for vocational qualifications because they benefited the school, even though they were considered of less value to those children than GCSE qualifications. Yet, it is possible that the negative effects of gaming the system were acutely experienced by Black children. For instance, returning to the practice of schools off-rolling (which Black children are possibly more susceptible to) in order to improve their performance, as the data suggests it was possible for a school to remove a child from its roll by meeting the costs of AP. Whilst this came at what is sometime a significant cost to the school (DfE, 2016), there were benefits for the institution if the child was unlikely to meet the headline measure, as in many cases their results would not have counted against the school's performance. Yet, as I set out earlier, such measures may have worked to the disadvantage of the children involved.

In addition, the data suggests that equivalency policies were enacted to improve the performance of schools against the headline measures. Research undertaken by the think tank Civitas (see de Waal, 2008) adds further weight to this argument. It found that children had very little choice about whether they undertook vocational courses as opposed to GCSEs. It concluded that 'there is nothing democratic about this [process] although this is precisely the language which the strategies are couched in' (de Waal, 2008:17). This is significant to this thesis because Black children take up vocational courses at a higher rate than their White British counterparts (Kingdon and Cassen, 2007). However, these qualifications have been found to have a negative impact on people's future earnings when in employment when compared to the salaries of those with academic qualifications at the same level (although the gap is reduced when account is taken of the amount of time spent

to acquire different qualifications) (Dearden et al., 2000; Tackey et al., 2011). This gives rise to the view that some Black children are put at a disadvantage when accessing employment opportunities because of equivalency policies. This is at a time when, arguably, Black children need the most widely acceptable qualifications if they are to access the employment opportunities that they are often denied. What is more, Thompson (2016) suggests that some Academies made more use of vocational courses with equivalency status than all mainstream schools and Wrigley and Kalambouka (2012:8) found that, in 2011, the headline results of academies had been 'inflated by the extensive use of alternative qualifications'. Their analysis showed that if equivalency qualifications were excluded children educated in academies were only two-thirds as likely to gain the headline measure than those in other schools (ibid). Given that there were disproportionately more Black children in Academies (DfE, 2011a) which, as I set out earlier in this thesis, Michael Gove (SoS) argued was an advantage to this group, it may also suggest that they were more likely to be subjected to equivalency policies.

Therefore, one may conclude that Black children were effectively denied the educational opportunities available to their counterparts in disproportionate numbers due to gaming the system. It is worth pointing out, however, that there is research that suggests equivalency policies were enacted to a lesser degree in London than elsewhere in England (Greaves et al., 2014). In addition, consideration must be given to evidence which suggests that, due to changes in the school accountability regime, by 2014 there was a reduction in the use of equivalent qualifications (Hutchings et al., 2016) which, one may deduce, means a reduction in equivalency policies. However, there is already research to suggest that new courses with equivalency status within in the new accountability regime are being used to game the system as they can improve the progress score of some students (Thompson, 2016).

If, as the data suggests, gaming the system contributed to the raising of standards in London and, as a result, the attainment of some Black children, these policies may also assist in substantiating the existence of the interest convergence principle in this case. What I mean by this is that it draws attention to the inconsistencies in policy enactment that I first referred to in chapter 5. At that juncture, I argued the underachievement of Black children was low

on the agenda of successive governments. It was for this reason that, for example, successive governments failed to equip Aiming High with the resources, political focus and support but, more importantly, robust accountability mechanisms, that policies afforded high priority status enjoyed. As a result, Aiming High received little sustained focus and attention from schools (thus resulting in insignificant change). On the other hand, the need to raise standards in London was a high priority for successive governments, which was underpinned by political imperatives and, therefore, was allocated the resources, political focus and support robust accountability mechanisms that led to significant and sustained focus and attention from schools. Indeed, such was the pressure placed on schools that they enacted morally corrupt policies in order to ensure they were successful.

### **The status quo**

There is one further point that I wish to make that can only be understood through the examination of the entire theme, as opposed to the analysis of the individual data codes I have constructed. The issue concerns the policies schools enacted and institutional racism. In order to explain this in more detail, it is important to return to some of the scholarly work I set out earlier. In chapter 2, I drew attention to the work of Troyna and Williams (1986:54) in which they argued that the Black radicals of America used institutional racism as a concept to capture a form of racial discrimination that operates through 'the interconnecting relationships of several institutional areas', rather than the functions of a single institution. In addition, I highlighted the definition of institutional racism offered by Blauner (1972:185), who described the way in which Black people experience 'blocked educational opportunities' that give rise to a cycle of racial discrimination and inequality.

It is arguably the case that the data in this chapter gives rise to the view that schools, through the policies they have enacted to improve their performance (i.e. the formation of target groups, the focus on the C/D borderline and gaming the system) have denied Black children opportunities in education and elsewhere. As a result, the neoliberal policies enacted in schools have contributed to the maintenance of the status quo in education, where Black people have routinely been disadvantaged. To CRT scholars, the status quo is



the 'unequal and unjust distribution of power and resources along political, economic, racial and gendered lines (...) across the globe', which is supported and legitimised by the respective legal systems, that 'established power relationships of society' (Taylor, 2016:1). Therefore, it acts as a fundamental aspect of the counter-narrative offered by CRT (Bell, 1980; Delgado and Stefancic, 2000; Mutua, 2006; Gillborn, 2008; Taylor, 2016). For example, CRT scholars are concerned with bringing to light and challenging the racist policies that work to subordinate and disenfranchise Black people and in doing so attempt to maintain the status quo (Milner, 1998). Indeed, DeCuir and Dixon (2004:28) wrote the following:

[T]he vast disparities between elite Whites and most communities of color, gains that coincide with the self-interests of White elites are not likely to make a substantive difference in the lives of people of color.

The notion of self-interest is also important to this issue. It gives rise to important questions about the nature of progress, or otherwise, secured through interest convergence. Milner (2008:334), for example, argued that self-interest prevents progress on issues of race equality:

The sacrifice necessary for real social change to take place is sometimes too painful or inconceivable; it may be difficult for those in our country to take serious strides toward racial, social, and economic justice because it means that, in some cases, some group has to give up something of interest to it, such as its privileges and its ways of life. The problem is that many worry about how change can threaten their position, status, and privilege (...) and, consequently, the status of their children and future generations.

Therefore, the interest convergence principle explains why the status quo is maintained (Bell, 1980; Leigh, 2003; Donner, 2005). Donner (2005:47), for example, argued that interest-convergence is an 'analytical construct' of CRT that explains how policies established to promote equality maintain the status quo.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have set out the data in relation to the policies schools enacted in response to the pressure placed on them to raise standards. It is clear that, for example, this pressure led to a continuum of policy enactment that focused on being ever more effective through any means possible (Ball et al., 2012, 2012a). For instance, in an effort to secure the highest possible results, schools enacted policies entirely focused on raising standards with little consideration for the moral consequences. Ball et al. (2012:528) found that some teachers raised similar issues in the schools they studied. They argued that there were 'tensions between the interests of the school and the interests of the students', as in some case it was 'the overall A–C percentage and the competitive interests of the school that [were] the focus of attention rather than individual students' needs or student well-being' (ibid). They concluded that '[p]ragmatism and necessity trump wider responsibilities towards students' (Ball et al., 2012:528). It is possible to contend that this is akin to the neoliberal technology of deliverology (Barber, 2007; Ball et al., 2012, 2012a) that I first referred to in chapter 4. This involved the application of relentless pressure in order to realise the results government required, the connection of learning to policy and the re-structuring of the relations of power and authority:

[This is] a technology of performance, a techne of government, which gets policy 'done' in very effective ways by creating an economy of visibility which brings students, teachers and schools into the gaze of policy. It is rendered into the particular form and language of the 'delivery chain' and the 'standards agenda' (Ball et al., 2012a:530).

It is possible that the policies I have drawn attention to in this chapter, which were motivated by institutional self-interest, led to improved standards in London and that some Black children may have benefited from this. However, it may also be the case that they had a negative impact on many children from various ethnic groups, but Black children in particular that ultimately bring into question their worth. Indeed, it is likely that, for Black children, they ultimately assisted in maintaining the status quo.

Having now set out the data I have collected for this thesis, in the next chapter I want to draw attention to the main conclusions.

## **8. Conclusion**

To plan for the future by reviewing the experiences of the past - we must ask whether the formidable hurdles we now face in the elusive quest for racial equality are simply a challenge to our commitment, whether they are the latest variation of the old hymn "One More River to Cross." Or, as we once again gear up to meet the challenges posed by these unexpected new setbacks, are we ignoring a current message with implications for the future which history has already taught us about the past?

Derrick Bell (1992:5)

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this thesis has been to establish and explain the effect government policy, enacted in education between 1997 and 2017, has had on the educational attainment of Black children attending secondary schools in London. In each chapter, I have set out in detail the conclusions I have arrived at. I will not, therefore, repeat them in detail here. However, I do want to summarise the most salient conclusions, draw attention to a number of limitations and set out several issues that this thesis gives rise to that could be pursued in further research.

### **Main conclusions**

It is clear that race is a critical factor in the distribution of privilege in the education system and that White people enjoy a 'superior societal status' (Bell, 1980:523). This is exemplified by the approach successive governments took to the underachievement of Black children. For example, the evidence I have presented suggests that, whilst there were moments of heightened concern, the underachievement of Black children remained a mute issue in the education system. What I mean by this is that long periods of inactivity by governments and schools were punctuated by short bursts of attention afforded to this problem. This has led to a lack of appropriate and sustained policy enactment aimed at raising the attainment of Black children. What is more, it appears that, during the period this thesis is concerned with,

any attention afforded to race by successive governments and schools was dominated by policy enactment targeted at raising the attainment of the so-called White Working Class. In this thesis, I used the term so-called in order to emphasise the fundamental flaws in the way White Working Class was conceptualised and used in public policy discourse (i.e. this group was often deemed a racial group in and of itself). This ensured that successive governments and schools (a) prioritised the so-called White Working Class at the expense of other children and (b) invested in this group both economically and politically in ways that were absent whenever what little attention the underachievement of Black children was afforded materialised. I will return to this issue later in this concluding section.

The evidence in this thesis also leads one to conclude that the recent improvements in the educational attainment of Black children have masked the low status afforded to race under successive governments. The interest convergence principle was critical in explaining why the attainment of Black children may have increased during a period in which their underachievement was de-prioritised as a problem. As I set out in chapter 5, in order to explain why the attainment of Black children increased, one must consider why London became a 'laboratory for educational reform' (Gove, 2012.para.19) and the effect this may have had on the attainment of children in the Capital. As I concluded, it is clear that successive governments prioritised London and enacted neoliberal policy ideas in order to raise standards (some politicians even proclaimed that these measures were specifically intended to raise the attainment of Black children). However, whilst the prioritisation of London was often presented as a response to low standards in the Capital, it was in fact intended to address the outrage of the White middle class with regard to their inability to access high performing schools. This created an imperative for successive governments to locate their flagship policies in the region. The evidence clearly states that these actions were driven by the institutional self-interest of successive governments and schools. Yet, what is interesting is that it may be the case that the prioritisation of London and the enactment of neoliberal reforms may have worked to the advantage of some Black children. For example, the pressure placed on schools to raise standards, the formation of a neoliberal school accountability regime predicated on data and the subsequent policies schools were forced to enact, might explain why the attainment of some Black children increased. If this was the

case, it is possible for one to conclude that the policy enactment during this period represents a classic case of interest convergence. What I mean by this is that race equality in education was advanced (which was clearly in the interest of Black people) because it was principally in the self-interest of successive governments (acting on behalf of White people) to secure such improvements.

There are four main reasons why I arrived at this conclusion. First, the decision taken by successive governments to prioritise London resulted in sixty percent of all Black children in England benefiting from the additional policy and monetary investment made into education in the region. This may in part explain why the attainment of Black children increased. However, the prioritisation of London (and the policy enactment that it gave rise to) were neither intended to respond to the concerns of Black people nor address the racial discrimination that existed in the system. Therefore, any benefits Black children garnered from this activity was a matter of coincidence. Quite simply, a significant proportion of Black children lived in the region so they benefited as residents. Second, data proliferation and data hegemony were instrumental in raising standards in London and, as a result, the attainment of some Black children. For example, it is likely to be the case that data proliferation and data hegemony assisted in drawing attention to some of the worst excesses of racism and ensured teacher judgements, which have been shown to disadvantage Black children, were superseded by decisions informed by data. Third, neoliberal policies bequeathed to successive governments increased control over the education system. For example, the school accountability regime and the aggressive approach to state intervention incentivised schools to comply with government policy and strive towards achieving the highest performance they possibly could. These policies also acted as a deterrent to non-compliance and underperformance in the system. Consequently, schools in London were put under considerable pressure to adopt a by 'any means possible' (Ball et al., 2011:4) approach to raising standards. This may have worked to the advantage of some Black children, as schools in London (particularly those with high proportions of Black students) were forced to enact colour-blind policies that sought to raise the attainment of those Black children who could contribute to meeting the interests of their school. Based on the accounts given by the participants, Black children were prioritised for interventions alongside their

counterparts who shared the same profile. Indeed, it is possible that the pressure placed on schools required some to defy the data (i.e. prioritise children that the data stated were unlikely to attain the headline measure) in order to meet government targets and floor standards. It may be the case that for those Black children with the right data profile, these policies worked to their advantage, but for those that did not, they were often denied the investment and opportunities they may have otherwise received. Fourth, due to the pressures that were placed on schools to raise standards, they responded by enacting policies consistent with neoliberal ideas. Senior leaders, for example, were almost entirely focused on school effectiveness. This involved privileging the performance of some children at the expense of others and even enacting policies that were morally questionable.

It is also evident that, despite the relatively recent improvements in the overall attainment of Black children, which are attributable to interest convergence, the enactment of neoliberal policies has entrenched institutional racism. In this thesis, I have drawn attention to the enactment of policies such as the school accountability regime, targets and intervention groups, off-rolling and the manipulation of exam entries, as salient examples. There is already extensive scholarly work (some of which I have set out in this thesis) that demonstrates that these policies have worked to the disadvantage of Black children. As a result, this research has focused on understanding the extent to which successive governments and schools have chosen to enact such policies and explaining why they entrenched institutional racism. What is clear is that these policies have been able to, for example, de-prioritise and explain away the underachievement of Black children, divert resources away from raising their attainment and, through the enactment of morally questionable policies, restrict their ability to attain the required standard of education. The Black children adversely affected by these policies were those considered to have little value to successive governments and schools because they were deemed incapable of attaining the headline performance measure. One must, therefore, also arrive at the conclusion that the neoliberal policies credited with raising attainment failed to significantly change the overall experience of Black children and, indeed, conspired to undermine their educational progress. As a result, for these children, at the very best the reform agenda in London represented a re-enactment of the status quo.

## **Contribution to knowledge**

This thesis supports the academic evidence that already exists which demonstrates that the underachievement of Black children in London and the racial disparities they experienced were, and indeed are, the result of an institutionally racist education system, as well as an institutionally racist society (or, as I will explain later in this chapter, what I now consider to be a society that is the manifestation of white supremacy). However, in this section I want to set out what this study adds to the extensive body of work on race and education and, therefore, advances the debate in these areas.

One of the unique features of this thesis is that it starts from the premise that, notwithstanding several caveats, the narrative offered by successive governments on education is accurate (i.e. that the educational attainment of Black children has improved, the attainment gap has reduced and that this is the result of government policy). It then seeks to explain why these improvements have been secured and draws attention to the negative consequences for Black children.

This thesis also seeks to thoroughly capture how education policy enacted down the delivery chain (see Figure 5) has had an impact on Black children in London. In doing so, it adds weight to the research findings of Gillborn and Youdell (2000), which I have set out in this thesis, but also illustrates how the unique set of circumstances in London (i.e. the policy pressures from successive governments and a large cohort of Black children) may not only have consigned a disproportionate number of Black children to educational underachievement, but also forced schools to prioritise some Black children and defy the national data matrix in order to maximise their performance for what were reasons of institutional self-interest.

The primary data in as of itself is also unique, as it illustrates the experiences of a specific group of civil servants and senior leaders between 1997 and 2015 (when the final interview was conducted). What is more, the way in which race was only raised in the semi-structured interviews if the participants chose to mention it first is potentially innovative. In addition, whilst there is likely to be precedence for the extensive use of secondary data from



politicians and their advisors in research on race and education in London, this thesis is distinct in the way in which it used speeches and parliamentary material in order to understand their views and actions in relation to this policy area during the period this thesis is concerned with.

This thesis advances the debate on race and education policy by offering an alternative perspective on policy enactment in London during the time this thesis is concerned with. What I mean by this is that, even if one were to accept without qualification the view that there have been improvements in the educational achievement of Black children and reductions in racial disparities, by using CRT (and the interest convergence principle in particular) this thesis has exposed the fallacy that these changes are the result of a concerted effort by successive governments and schools working in the interest of Black children and demonstrates that they are in fact the result of white supremacy.

In addition to this, a secondary effect of this thesis has been to reaffirm the centrality of CRT in countering the sustained and robust challenge that is underway that seeks to reject the notion that Black children remain a group that is racially discriminated against in the education system and, therefore, should be the focus of meaningful attention from government. Of course, this challenge is not new, but it is now being fought in the context of successive governments and their allies propagating the view that (a) the position of Black children in the education system is either not an issue or has materially improved to the point that it is no longer a concern and (b) what in reality was at best a momentary and superficial focus on the underachievement of Black children has been enacted at the expense of the real race victims, who are the so-called White Working Class.

## **Limitations**

Having explained the main conclusions, I want to draw attention to the most salient limitations of this thesis. The first is methodological. As I highlighted in the methods section, from the outset I decided not to seek interviews with politicians and their advisors, given that gaining access to these individuals would have been exceptionally challenging. Yet,

it is important to recognise that this thesis would have been significantly enhanced if it were possible to put questions to these groups and, therefore, gain their first-hand accounts.

The proliferation of quantitative data and the hegemonic status it has been afforded were reoccurring issues throughout the data collection, analysis and write up process. I referred to these issues in several chapters and drew attention to examples of the policies that illustrated some of the ways in which quantitative data dominated decision making and policy enactment. Subsequently, I drew attention to some of the benefits and costs for Black children. However, a more detailed and thorough analysis of these developments (possibly through the establishment of a single theme that focused on these issues) would have benefited the conclusions I reached.

Whilst I argued that institutional self-interest determined the actions of successive governments and schools, there was evidence to suggest that a moral imperative played a role in raising standards. What I mean by this is that some senior leaders considered it a moral obligation to raise the attainment of the most disadvantaged children and reduce inequalities between this group and their peers (Fullan, 2003). Further research may have established whether this was (1) a significant factor in the increase in attainment of Black children and (2) an important determinant in the standards agenda more broadly. This is particularly the case given that Tim Brighouse (2007, 2014, 2015) claimed it was a key factor in the success of London Challenge.

The second limitation concerns the prioritisation of London. It is entirely plausible that immigration and the lack of access to employment opportunities by, for example, the so-called White working class, may have also played a role in this decision. However, I chose not to focus on these factors as there was insufficient space to do so. Yet, further research into these issues may have been advantageous given that they were raised by, amongst others, Tim Brighouse (see Brighouse, 2007) as contributing factors. The decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union in 2016 exemplifies why this is such an important avenue of inquiry, as it appears that public opinion in relation to these issues has

the ability to influence government policy in significant ways (Springford, 2013; Goodwin and Heath, 2016; Vasilopoulou, 2016).

The conclusions I have reached act as further evidence in support of the view that the education system is institutionally racist and perpetuates the societal form of institutional racism I described in this thesis. In chapter 2, I set out the conceptual debate on the term institutional racism. I questioned the use of white supremacy as defined by CRT scholars and argued that institutional racism remains a valuable concept to describe racism at a societal level. However, it may be the case that white supremacy is indeed the right concept to capture the societal form of racism I described. I have arrived at this conclusion because the white supremacy of the fascist and neo-Nazi form is re-emerging and being given legitimacy by the Donald Trump Presidency in the US. This means that Black and other minority ethnic people are faced with the twin threats of white supremacy in its traditional form and as it is defined by CRT, which means that, in the future, institutional racism might not be the appropriate concept. Whilst this is currently an issue in the US, globalisation means there is the threat of contagion. If I were to begin this thesis now, I would be minded to take this into consideration.

### **Further research**

I now want to draw attention to four areas of further research that I would wish to pursue as a result of undertaking this thesis. The first concerns what I have referred to on several occasions in this thesis as the 'post-racial fallacy' (Gillborn et al., 2016:5). In this thesis, I argued that the underachievement of Black children has been largely absent from the political agenda and that this has had a debilitating effect on public policy aimed at raising their attainment. In further research, I would like to explore whether the current hostile political and public policy climate is exacerbating this problem, as opposed to improving it. What I mean by this is that, through the enactment of generic equality policies, a new hierarchy of inequalities appears to have been established that has relegated the problems that exist in society along the lines of race. In education, for example, priority has been afforded to addressing inequalities between children of different economic circumstances

(an issue I have already discussed), whilst in society more generally gender equality (i.e. the disparities in experiences and outcomes of women compared to men) is at the top of the agenda. One may argue that this is no coincidence given that specific race relations legislation has been subsumed into generic equality law and the Commission for Racial Equality has been abolished and its work integrated into an organisation with a generic brief that includes issues of human rights (i.e. the Commission for Equalities and Human Rights). In addition to this, the current government has a Minister with extremely part-time responsibilities for Women and Equalities (notice the prominence afforded to gender in the title) and there is a corresponding select committee in the House of Commons that scrutinises the work in this area. This has left racial inequality a relegated problem that is often fighting for attention and may be making it even more difficult to ensure that institutional racism in the education system is given the urgent attention it requires.

I would also seek to carry out further research into the role of the state in addressing problems such as racial inequality. What I am particularly interested in and, therefore, would like to pursue through further research, is whether the central state possesses the policy tools to raise the attainment of Black children and eliminate its causes (thus, make a contribution to eradicating white supremacy, as it is defined by CRT). Whilst I did not address this issue in this thesis, by virtue of the conclusions I have arrived at, I have contended that, if the government chose to, it could indeed achieve such change. This, however, is in contrast to the view held by the Coalition, which stated the following:

The evidence of inequality in our own school system clearly shows that (...) government is simply not best placed to respond effectively to the wide variety of circumstances and challenges faced by schools and their pupils, and nor are inspectors, advisers and central government officials the people best able to extend opportunity to every child. So, instead, we need to make sure that the experienced and dedicated professionals in our schools have the freedoms and support that they need to succeed in delivering equality of opportunity (DfE, 2011a:7).

This suggests that the Coalition clearly accepted that racial inequality is a problem, but effectively absolved the central state from responsibility for addressing it. Yet, it is arguably the case that the data in this thesis is a repudiation of this claim (particularly with regard to the underachievement of Black children) given that, together, successive governments were able to raise standards in London through the enactment of measures that forced schools to address the issue of low standards in the Capital.

The role of the media, which did not form a substantive part of my analysis and does not significantly feature in the conclusions I have reached, but was implicitly referred to throughout this thesis, could also form the basis of additional research. It is evident, for example, that the media play a unique role in the formation of political imperatives that initiates government action. In this research, it is clear that they have assisted in the popularisation and legitimisation of neoliberalism as the default, taken-for-granted approach to policy enactment; the galvanisation and communication of public opinion which, as I argued in this thesis, created the political imperatives for successive governments to prioritise London; and they did the same in relation to the prioritisation of the so-called White Working Class (particularly in the creation of the 'victim discourse' (Gillborn, 2010a:3) and the promotion of this group as the 'new race victims' (Gillborn, 2009:22) that precipitated government action). What is more, their actions lead one to arrive at the conclusion that they are at least complicit in the maintenance of institutional racism.

There is, however, a more pressing area of research, which is concerned with an issue I raised in the previous section in relation to white supremacy. As a result of further research, I would seek to understand whether Black children's experience of the education system (not just in terms of attainment, but the curriculum they are offered, what is expected of them and their relationships with teachers, school staff and their peers) may be damaged further by the rise of nationalism and populism, which is a direct threat to racial equality. For example, it is increasingly clear that the impact of the UK's decision to withdraw from the European Union, the election of Donald Trump in the US and the rise of far right and extremist politicians and political parties in Europe presents a yet immeasurable level of risk to race relations in this country. This risk will be at its greatest if, but arguably when, the

promises made by these populist and racist politicians and agitators do not materialise and there is a realisation by their supporters that the solutions these actors promised fail to be enacted and/or they do not address the issues they were claimed to. For instance, if exiting the European Union does not result in the end of almost all immigration and the life chances of White economically disadvantaged people does not significantly improve, might this give rise to dangerous levels of resentment and blame along the lines of race? Moreover, might it advance white supremacy and the popularisation of white supremacists, as is taking place in the US? If this were to happen, Black people would not only be faced with the consequences of the social, economic and political status quo, but with the further entrenchment of racism in institutions such as the education system.

If we are to break free from the status quo, these issues, amongst others, require the attention of scholars, activists, but also politicians, officials and school leaders.

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## 10. Appendices

### Appendix A: Acronyms

#### Titles

<b>AHT</b>	Assistant Headteacher
<b>CALS</b>	Chief Adviser for London Schools
<b>CM</b>	Cabinet Minister
<b>CS</b>	Civil Servant
<b>DHT</b>	Deputy Headteacher
<b>DLC</b>	Director of London Challenge
<b>DPM</b>	Deputy Prime Minister
<b>HMCI</b>	Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, Ofsted
<b>HT</b>	Headteacher
<b>MoL</b>	Mayor of London
<b>MoS</b>	Minister of State
<b>MP</b>	Member of Parliament
<b>PM</b>	Prime Minister
<b>PUSS</b>	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
<b>SoS</b>	Secretary of State

#### Organisations in

#### education

<b>CTC</b>	City Technology Colleges
<b>DfE</b>	Department for Education <sup>32</sup>
<b>GM School</b>	Grant Maintained School
<b>LA</b>	Local Authority (i.e. a council)
<b>LEA</b>	Local Education Authority
<b>Ofsted</b>	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills

**In school systems,**  
**processes and**  
**measures**

<b>EBacc</b>	English Baccalaureate
<b>KS3</b>	Key Stage 3
<b>KS4</b>	Key Stage 4
<b>Post-16</b>	Education provision for 16-19-year olds
<b>SEN</b>	Special Educational Needs
<b>SLT</b>	Senior Leadership Team

**Other**

<b>OEDC</b>	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>SLI</b>	Stephan Lawrence Inquiry



## Appendix B: Secondary data documents

<b>Table 3: Secondary data documents</b>		
<b>Produced by governments</b>	<b>Produced by the state (non-government)</b>	<b>Produced by third party</b>
Green Papers	Ofsted research	Government commissioned evaluations and reports
Official speeches in the capacity of a Minister	Ofsted reports	Newspaper articles
Press releases	Press releases from government agencies	Political speeches made by politicians
White Papers	Parliamentary documents (including records from Hansard and Select Committees)	

## Appendix C: Prefix for online searches

<b>Table 4: Prefix for online searches</b>		
<b>Governments</b>	<b>Departments and policies</b>	<b>Speeches</b>
Coalition education	<b>Departments</b>	<b>Secretaries of State</b>
Coalition education	Department for Children,	Alan Johnson
Coalition education white papers	Schools & Families	David Blunkett
Coalition policy	Department for Education	Charles Clarke
Coalition policy documents	Department for Education &	Ed Balls
Coalition raising standards	Employment	Estelle Morris
Conservative education	Department for Education &	Michael Gove
Conservative education	Skills	Nicky Morgan
Conservative education white	Parliament Education	Ruth Kelly
papers	Committee	
Conservative policy		<b>Ministers</b>
Conservative policy documents	<b>Policies</b>	Andrew Adonis
Conservative raising standards	Academies	David Miliband
Labour education	Aiming High	Nick Gibb
Labour education	City Challenge	
Labour education white papers	Excellence in Cities	<b>Officials</b>
Labour policy	London Challenge	David Bell
Labour policy documents	National Strategies	Christine Gilbert
Labour raising standards		Michael Wilshaw
		Mike Tomlinson
		Tim Brighouse

## Appendix D: Primary data: names and titles of participants

### Department for Education

#### **Civil Servants**

Mr Carmichael	Civil Servants	The participants were all serving or had served as senior civil servants within the Department for Education. They had significant, and in some cases ultimate, responsibility for policy. As senior civil servants, their roles were commensurate with being a Director or Deputy Director. I have chosen not to disclose the ethnicity and specific titles of the post they each hold or held as this would make them identifiable.
Mr Dyce	Civil Servants	
Mr Hammond	Civil Servants	
Mrs Watson	Civil Servants	
Mr Fitzpatrick	Civil Servants	

#### **Senior Leaders<sup>33</sup>**

#### **Headteachers**

Ms Carrington	Headteacher	Ms Carrington is a White female who has worked in several secondary schools in London. She has held a number of senior leadership roles in schools. This is her first headship.
Mr Connelly	Headteacher	Mr Connelly is a White male who has worked in several secondary schools in London. He has held a number of senior leadership roles in schools. This is his first headship.
Mr Llywelyn	Headteacher	Mr Llewelyn is a mixed race (Black/White) male who has worked in several secondary schools in London. He has held a number of senior leadership roles in schools. This is his first headship.

#### **Deputy Headteachers**

Mrs Akiloy	Acting Associate Deputy Principal	Mrs Akiloy is a Black female who has worked in several secondary schools in London. Her current post is the second she has held as a senior leader.
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<sup>33</sup> The title set out next to each participant denotes the position he or she held at the time of the interview or the most recent position prior to the interview that is relevant to the account he or she gave.

Ms Maguire      Acting Vice Principal      Ms Maguire is a White female who has worked in several secondary schools in London. Her current post is the second she has held as a senior leader.

Mrs Ainsworth      Vice Principal      Mrs Ainsworth is a White female who has worked in several secondary schools in London. She has held a number of senior leadership roles in schools.

### **Assistant Headteachers**

Ms Baines      Assistant Headteacher      Ms Bains is a White female who has worked in several secondary schools in London. Her current post is the second she has held as a senior leader.

Ms Bishop      Assistant Principal      Ms Bishop is a White female who has worked in outer London but is now working in an inner London secondary school. Her current post is the first she has held as a senior leader.

Mr Fitzpatrick      Assistant Headteacher      Mr Fitzpatrick is a White male who has worked in several secondary schools in London. His current post is his second senior leadership role.

Mr Foster      Assistant Vice Principal      Mr Foster is a White male who has worked in several secondary schools in London. His current post is his second senior leadership role.

Ms Lee      Assistant Headteacher      Ms Lee is a White female who has worked in several secondary schools in London. Her current post is the first she has held as a senior leader.

Mr O'Leary      Assistant Headteacher      Mr O'Leary is a White male who has worked in several secondary schools in London. His current post is the first he has held as a senior leader.

Mr Parker      Assistant Headteacher      Mr Parker is a White male who has worked in several secondary schools in London. He has held several posts as a senior leader.

Mr Sandbrook      Assistant Headteacher      Mr Sandbrook is a White male who has worked in two secondary schools in London. Prior to this he worked in a secondary school in the north of England. His current post is his first senior leadership role.

Mr Wilson      Assistant Headteacher      Mr Wilson is a White male who has worked in several secondary schools in London. His current post is his second senior leadership role.

## Appendix E: Policy documents

<b>Government<sup>34</sup></b>	<b>Government agencies</b>	<b>Political organisations</b>
Department for Children, Schools & Families (DCSF) (2008) Vision for London 2008-2011: London Education on the Way to World Class	Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) (1999) Raising the Attainment of Minority Ethnic Pupils	Conservative Party (2015) The Conservative Party Manifesto
Department for Education (DfE) (2010) The Importance of Teaching - The Schools White Paper	Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) (2001) Managing Support for the Attainment of Pupils from Minority Ethnic Groups	HM Government (2013a) The Coalition: Together in the National Interest Mid-Term Review – Programme for Government Update
Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2003) Aiming High: Raising the Attainment of Ethnic Minority Pupils		Labour Party (2010) The Labour Party Manifesto: A Future Fair for All
Department for Education & Skills (DfES) (2003a) The London Challenge: Transforming London Secondary Schools		Liberal Democrat (2010) Liberal Democrat Manifesto 2010
Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2005) Higher Standards, Better Schools for All More Choice for Parents and Pupils		
Department for Education & Skills (DfES) (2005) London Challenge: From Good to Outstanding		

<sup>34</sup> The government department with responsibility for education has, overtime, held different titles. However, in order to provide clarity, throughout this thesis I have referred to it as the Department for Education.

## Appendix F: Secondary data: names and titles of politicians, officials, advisors

### Politicians, officials, advisors<sup>35</sup>

#### Positions in Her Majesty's Government

<b>Prime Minister</b>	<b>Administration</b>	<b>Period in office</b>
Tony Blair	Labour	1997-2007
David Cameron	Coalition/Conservative	2010-2016
Theresa May	Conservative	2016-present

#### **Deputy Prime Minister**

Nick Clegg	Coalition	2010-2015
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#### **Department for Education**

<b>Secretary of State</b>	<b>Administration</b>	<b>Period in office</b>
Charles Clarke	Labour	2002-2004
Ed Balls	Labour	2007-2010
Michael Gove	Coalition	2010-2014
Nicky Morgan	Coalition & Conservative	2014-2016

<b>Minister of State</b>	<b>Administration</b>	<b>Period in office</b>
David Miliband	Labour	2002-2004
Stephen Twigg	Labour	2004-2005
Jacqui Smith	Labour	2005-2006
David Laws	Coalition	2012-2015
Nick Gibb	Coalition/Conservative	2010-2012 & 2014-2017

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<sup>35</sup> The title set out next to each politician, official, advisor or non-public official that formed the basis of the secondary data denotes the position he or she held at the time the relevant statement or comment was made. In some circumstances I have made a judgment about the time period being referred to and then attributed the relevant title.

<b>Parliamentary Under Secretary of State Education</b>	<b>Administration</b>	<b>Period in office</b>
Jacqui Smith	Labour	1999-2001
Stephen Twigg	Labour	2002-2004
Lord Andrew Adonis	Labour	2005-2008
Elizabeth Truss	Coalition	2012-2014
Lord John Nash	Coalition/Conservative	2013-present

#### **Cabinet Ministers**

<b>Minister without Portfolio</b>	<b>Administration</b>	<b>Period in office</b>
Peter Mandelson	Labour	1997-1998
Kenneth Clarke	Coalition	2012-2014

#### **Positions in Her Majesty's Official Opposition**

<b>Leader of Her Majesty's Most Loyal Opposition</b>	<b>Administration</b>	<b>Period in office</b>
Ed Miliband	Labour	2010-2015

#### **Shadow Secretary of State for Education**

Stephen Twigg	Labour	2011-2013
Lucy Powell	Labour	2015-2016

#### **Shadow Secretary of State for the Home Department**

Oliver Letwin	Conservative	2001-2003
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## **Parliament**

<b>House of Commons</b>	<b>Administration in office</b>	<b>Period in office</b>
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### **Education Committee**

Graham Stuart	Labour/Coalition	2007-2015
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Nic Dakin	Coalition	2010-2011
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David Ward	Coalition	2012-2015
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<b>Member of Parliament</b>	<b>Political Party</b>	<b>Period in office</b>
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Diane Abbott	Labour	1987-present
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## **Other political offices**

<b>Mayor of London</b>	<b>Administration</b>	<b>Period in office</b>
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Boris Johnson	Conservative	2008-2016
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## **Civil Servants, public officials and advisors**

<b>Her Majesty's Chief</b>	<b>Administration in office</b>	<b>Period in office</b>
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### **Inspectors, Ofsted**

Christine Gilbert	Labour	2006-2011
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Sir Michael Wilshaw	Coalition/Conservative	2012-2016
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Amanda Spielman	Conservative	2017-present
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### **Chief Adviser for London**

#### **Schools**

Sir Tim Brighouse	Labour	2002-2007
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Sir Mike Tomlinson	Labour	2007-2009
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**Director of London**

**Challenge**

Jon Coles	Labour	2002-2005
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**Senior Policy Advisor,**

**Department for Education**

Tom Richmond	Coalition	2013-2015
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**Non-public officials**

**Chief Executive, Future**

**Leaders Trust**

Heath Monk	Labour/Coalition	2007-2016
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## Appendix G: Interview topic guide

Thank the participant for taking part in the interview.

Explain the research in brief.

State all aspects in relation to ethics (including confidentiality, optional to take part, ending the interview and option to decline to answer questions).

State the interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

Confirm that they are happy to take part.

Introduction	To begin with, would you briefly explain your role and responsibilities in the Department for Education/your school?
Prioritisation	What were your first impressions of the Department for Education/your school when you took over this role? On taking up this role, what did you consider the main priorities to be? Were these priorities informed/influenced by any internal or external factors and/or discussions with others?
Underachievement	Are there any particular groups of children who give cause for concern? How long have they been a problem? How did you realise there was a problem?
Evidence	When determining who the underachieving groups are and what the interventions should be, to what extent is emerging evidence or research taken into consideration? To what extent is best practice, either local or national, taken into consideration when designing intervention strategies for specific underachieving groups? To what extent are ideas, evidence, research and information provided by any of the following groups taken into consideration?
Decision making	Would you please tell me about the regional or school improvement strategies/plans the Department for Education/your school has in place? Who makes the decisions as to whether improvement strategies/plans are fit for purpose? Are there any external stakeholders, organisations etc. involved in developing improvement strategies/plans?
School standards	It is often argued that successive governments have driven what is known as the 'standards agenda'; this basically refers to a central government directed school improvement programme. Is this a process you recognise? To what extent does this standards agenda influence the way in which the Department for Education/your school identifies underachieving groups and the interventions to tackle this underperformance?

What is the role and influence of the local authority?

Wash-up                      Before we end, is there anything else you would like to say or add?

Thank the participant for taking part in this interview.