



How Gatsby Benchmark 4 became a whole school improvement journey

“At The Duston School, our Careers vision is to empower pupils to Dream big, Believe in themselves, and Achieve their full potential.

We strive to create a learning environment that fosters innovation, creativity, and critical thinking, where pupils are inspired to pursue their passions and develop the skills necessary to succeed in their chosen career paths. Through rigorous academic programs, personalised support, **and real-world experiences**, we aim to equip our pupils with the knowledge, aspiration and resilience they need to make a **positive and respectful impact in their communities and achieve their wildest dreams**”.



Aspiration - Resilience - Respect

Today I will be covering:

- The 'why'?
- The approach
- Collating/exploring the data
- The outcomes

Most importantly how we went from 100% to 15%... and Back Again



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Gatsby Benchmark 4

Linking curriculum learning to careers

As part of the school's programme of careers education, all teachers should link curriculum learning with careers. Subject teachers should highlight the progression routes for their subject and the relevance of the knowledge and skills developed in their subject for a wide range of career pathways

The why?:

- May 2025 statutory guidance introduced new expectations
- Benchmark 4 changed to every year, every subject, every pupil
- I could no longer truthfully report consistent delivery across the curriculum
- My Compass Benchmark 4 score dropped from 100% to 15%
- Staff awareness of the changes was limited
- Staff engagement and CPD became essential



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For schools: every year, in every subject, every pupil should have opportunities to learn how the knowledge and skills developed in that subject helps people to gain entry to, and be more effective workers within, a wide range of careers.

Careers should form part of the institution's ongoing staff development programme for teachers, subject staff and all staff who support learners.

In schools, each subject should help pupils identify the essential skills they are developing and how the skills can help potential pathways to future careers.

[Careers guidance and access for education and training providers - GOV.UK](#)

What Changed in Benchmark 4?

The questions became much more demanding

Question	New expectation
4.1	Progression routes and careers links in all subjects
4.2	Careers information across curriculum areas
4.3	Careers links across sector pathways
4.4	Every year group experiencing careers learning across subjects
4.5	Careers embedded within staff CPD

My Biggest Challenge

Understanding It wasn't:

- ✗ Teachers
- ✗ Lack of careers activities
- ✗ Lack of support

It was: ✓ Understanding

Many staff said:

"I didn't realise Benchmark 4 had changed."

"We already do this."

"I don't know what counts".

"I'm not a careers teacher."

"Staff weren't resistant. They just needed clarity."

The Approach

Compass → Audit → Analysis → Report → CPD → Curriculum change

"Changing understanding, not increasing workload"



The Duston School – Subject Careers in the Curriculum Audit 2025–2026

Subject: _____ Completed by: _____ Date: _____

Section A

Year Group	Term (T1–T6)	Topics / Units	Careers Links (roles, industries, skills, progression routes etc)	Employer Input (speakers, projects, competitions)	Trips / Visits / External Opportunities
Year 7	T1				
Year 7	T2				



"We didn't improve Benchmark 4 by doing more careers. We improved it by making careers visible, explicit and evidence based."

★ **If it's not written down, how do I know about it?**

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Collating and Exploring the Data

- What did the evidence tell me?
- ✓ **Strong practice already existed**
- Computing
- Science
- Geography
- English
- Business
- ✓ **Most departments were doing more than I expected**
- ✓ **Careers links were often implicit rather than explicit**
- ✓ **Some subjects needed support rather than scrutiny**
- ✓ **Missing audits prevented me evidencing whole-school provision**
- ✓ **Staff confidence and understanding varied**

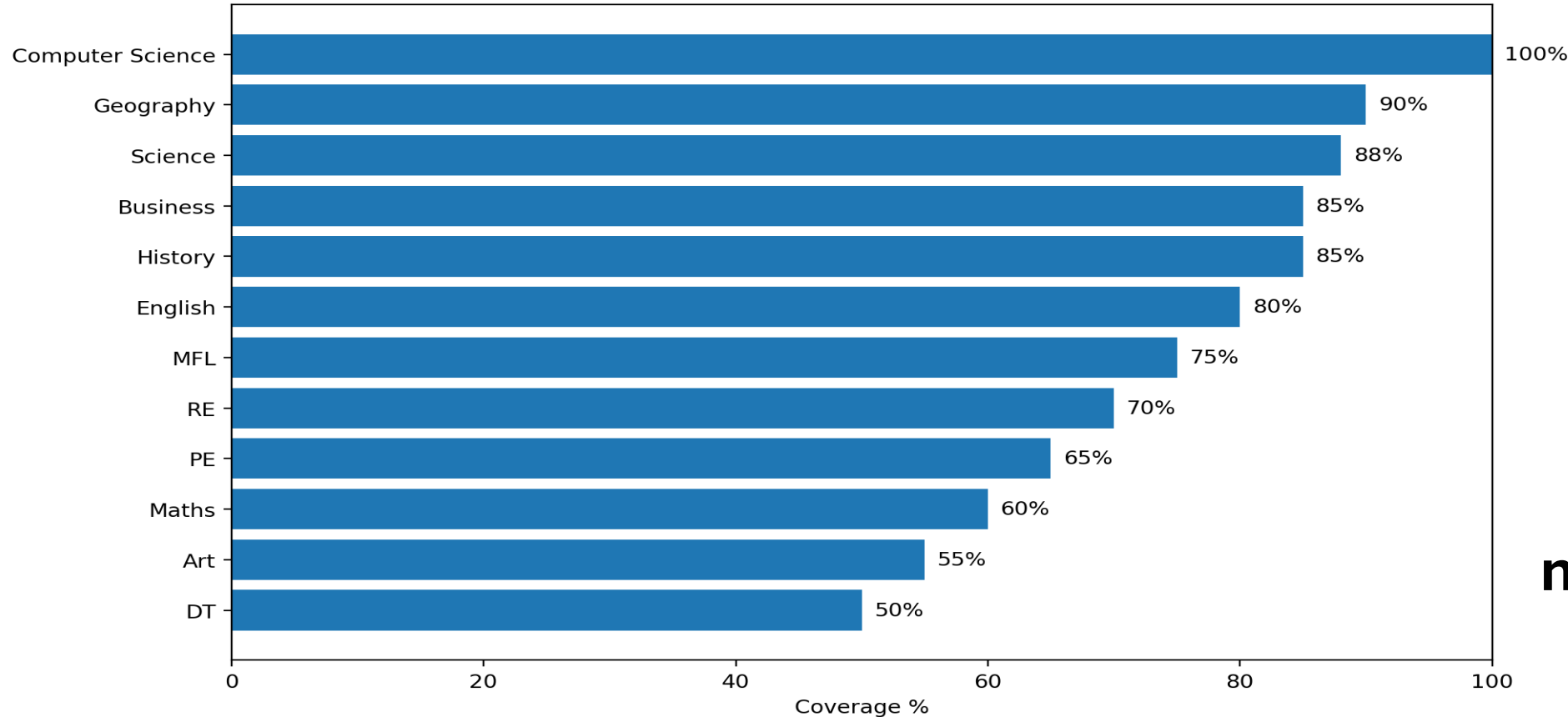
My biggest realisation

We didn't have a careers problem. We had an evidence problem.

★ **If it's not written down, how do I know about it?**

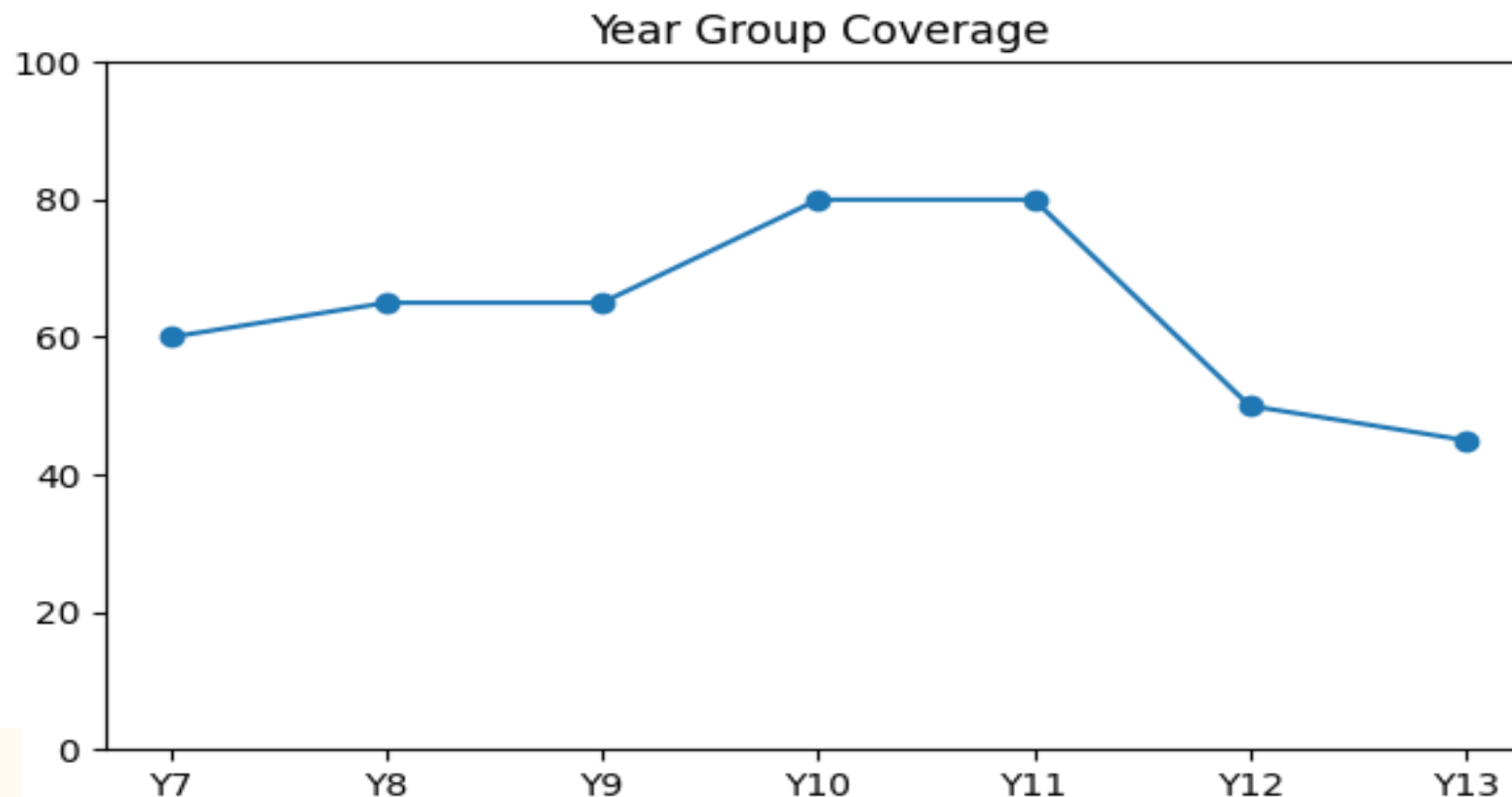
What the Data Showed

Curriculum Careers Audit – Subject Coverage



**"The challenge
wasn't creating
careers
education. The
challenge was
making it visible."**

Looking Across the Year Groups



**The issue
wasn't
careers.
It was
consistency.**

Department Spotlight – Modern Foreign Languages

Before

- Careers links present but not always explicit
- Repeated examples
- Limited progression routes
- Benchmark 4 score: 60%

After Curriculum Review

- ✓ Industry and labour market information embedded
- ✓ Greater variety of careers linked to languages
- ✓ Progression routes made explicit
- ✓ Employer encounters and Languages Week utilised
- ✓ International opportunities and work experience highlighted
- ✓ Links strengthened across KS3, KS4 and KS5
- ✓ Benchmark 4 score improved to 95%

**Understanding Benchmark 4 improved the
curriculum, not the workload.**

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How AI Helped Me

AI helped me to:

- ✓ Analyse subject audits consistently
- ✓ Identify strengths and gaps
- ✓ Produce faculty reports
- ✓ Generate graphs and visualisations
- ✓ Draft departmental feedback
- ✓ Develop CPD materials
- ✓ Create presentations and

Professional judgement remained essential

- Evidence was always checked manually.
- Departments were judged fairly and in context.
- AI supported decision making – it didn't replace it.

sources **"AI accelerated the process, but**
ave time and people changed the culture."

Changing the Culture - From compliance to curriculum

What I did

- ✓ Shared findings with subject leaders
- ✓ Produced individual department feedback
- ✓ Used subject leader meetings
- ✓ Delivered CPD and support
- ✓ Focused on improvement, not inspection
- ✓ Celebrated strengths
- ✓ Encouraged departments to own Benchmark 4

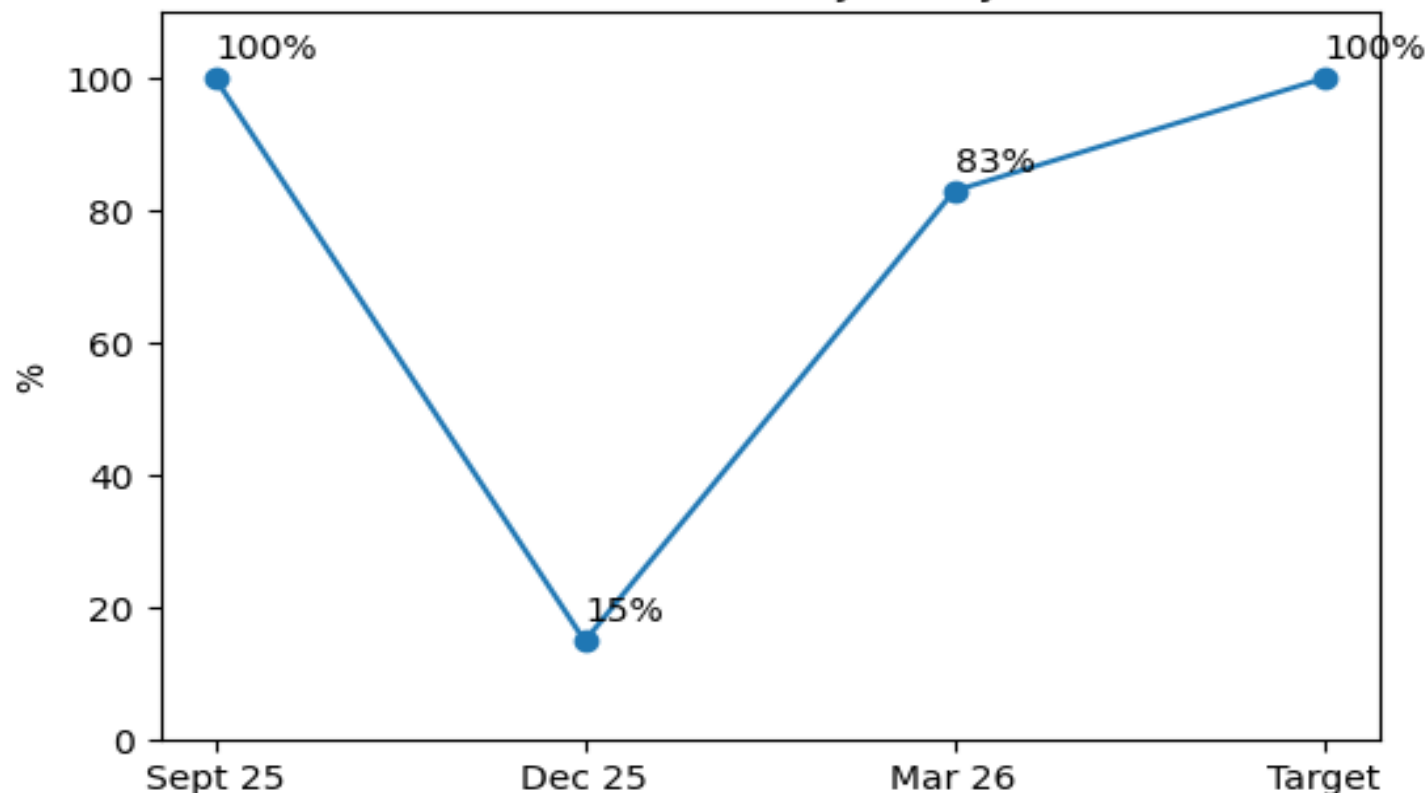
Biggest shift

Careers became everyone's responsibility, not just the Careers Leader's.

"We didn't improve Benchmark 4 by doing more careers. We improved it by changing understanding."

Impact

Benchmark 4 Journey



✓ **Sept 2025**

100%

Previous Benchmark 4 framework

⚠ **Dec 2025**

15%

New framework + honest self-assessment

🚀 **March 2026**

83%

Improved evidence, curriculum understanding and staff engagement

Target: close to 100% by July

2026 **Aspiration - Resilience - Respect**

What I Wish I'd Known

I thought I had a careers problem.

I was wrong.

- Benchmark 4 is a curriculum issue.
- Honest Compass scores are essential.
- Missing evidence matters.
- Support works better than scrutiny.
- AI can reduce workload.
- Small changes create big impact.

**We didn't improve
Benchmark 4 by doing
more careers. We
improved it by making
careers visible, explicit
and evidence-based."**

Thank you for listening



**If it's not written down, how do YOU
know about it?**