



From the Wasted Years to the Ambitious Years

KS3 Self-Evaluation Toolkit

Prompts for Professional
Development Conversations

 Key Stage 3:
The Ambitious Years

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Purpose

This toolkit supports senior leaders and teaching teams to evaluate and improve standards at Key Stage 3 (KS3), ensuring this phase moves from the Wasted Years towards the Ambitious Years.

It is designed for both self-assessment and collaborative reflection.

1

Section 1: Vision and Purpose

Core Question: Does KS3 have its own intellectual and developmental purpose in our school?

Indicators of strength:

-
-
-

Reflection Prompts

- How is the purpose of KS3 articulated in our improvement plan?
- Do staff, students, and governors understand why KS3 matters beyond GCSE preparation?
- How do we celebrate KS3 success stories?
- Is KS3 viewed as a sequel to KS2 or a prequel to GCSE?

Rating: 1 2 3 4 5

(1 = unclear / 5 = embedded in culture)

Evidence:

Next steps:

2

Section 2: Curriculum Coherence

Core Question: Is our KS3 curriculum designed for depth, not just coverage?

Indicators of Strength

- Curriculum planned from first principles
- Content builds on KS2 foundations
- Rich, challenging material used (not “GCSE-lite” or oversimplified)

Discussion Prompts

- Are we repeating content unnecessarily?
- What criteria do we use to judge the quality of curriculum materials?
- How is curriculum sequencing reviewed?

Rating: 1 2 3 4 5

Evidence:

Next steps:

3

Section 3: Teaching & Pedagogy

Core Question: Are classrooms at KS3 intellectually vibrant and inclusive?

Indicators of Strength

- Students are curious, challenged, and engaged and collaborative
- High-quality questioning and dialogue
- Teachers build independence and critical thinking
- High-quality, authentic resources / texts
- Metacognition

Reflection Prompts

- Do lessons focus on exploration or compliance?
- How do we cultivate student ownership of learning?

Rating: 1 2 3 4 5

Evidence:

Next steps:

4

Section 4: Assessment for Growth

Core Question: Does assessment serve learning?

Indicators of Strength

- Formative assessment informs next steps in learning during the lesson and curriculum planning
- Assessment culture builds confidence of children?
- Data systems support understanding by staff, not just accountability

Reflection Prompts

- Are we ~~over-relying on~~ using GCSE-style assessments?
- How do students understand their next steps?
- Are SEND/EAL learners assessed fairly? – (Does this mean, can they access the assessment / is it assessing what the teachers want it to?)
- Do we report using learner profiles to capture the full experience within and beyond school of learners?

Rating: 1 2 3 4 5

Evidence:

Next steps:

5

Section 5: Transition & Continuity

Core Question: How effectively do we build on KS2 learning and prepare for KS4?

Consider

- Strong partnerships with primary schools
- Shared understanding of pupil starting points
- Continuity in language, challenge, and pedagogy

Reflection

- Where and why do we repeat KS2 content?
- How do we ensure genuine progression?

Rating: 1 2 3 4 5

Evidence:

Next steps:

6

Section 6: Leadership & Resourcing

Core Question: Is KS3 resourced and led with ambition?

Indicators

- Expert/subject domain specialist staff allocated to KS3
- Strategic leadership oversight
- KS3 discussed regularly in strategic forums, including governors
- Subject budget based on KS3 allocation

Reflection

- How do we prioritise KS3 in CPD and staffing?
- Are time, budget, and training proportionate to its importance?
- Is curriculum led by staffing availability or teachers' interests?
- Does anyone say, 'we can't do that here/ teach that here/our kids won't like that'?

Rating: 1 2 3 4 5

Evidence:

Next steps:

7

Section 7: Student Experience & Voice

Core Question: What do students say about their experience of KS3?

Sample Questions

- What's the most interesting thing you've learned recently?
- Do you feel stretched and supported?
- How is KS3 different from primary school?
- Have you learned this at primary school?
- What helps you learn best?

Rating: 1 2 3 4 5

Evidence:

Next steps:

8

Section 8: Leadership Team Discussion Prompts

- What would a truly ambitious KS3 look and feel like in this school?
- Where does our current model still echo the Wasted Years?
- What cultural or structural shifts are needed to sustain ambition?

Summary of Priorities

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Section 9: From Wasted Years to Ambitious Years

Focus	Wasted Years	Ambitious Years
Purpose	KS3 as a rehearsal for KS4	KS3 as a stage of deep learning and curiosity
Curriculum	Repetition of KS2 / GCSE-lite	Original, challenging, concept-led design
Assessment	Tracking & grading	Feedback for growth & reflection
Staffing	Ad hoc, often colleagues teaching out of specialism	Domain specialists
Student Experience	Passive learning	Joyful challenge & intellectual engagement

Final reflection

“KS3 should be a time when students fall in love with learning again – where curiosity is rewarded, depth is normal, and ambition is expected.”



Prepared for: Senior Leadership Teams
| Curriculum Leads | Trust Partners



Key Stage 3:

The Ambitious Years