



# From the Wasted Years to the Ambitious Years

KS3 Self-Evaluation Toolkit

Prompts for Professional  
Development Conversations

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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.

**School:**  
**Completed by:**  
**Role:**  
**Date:**

# 1

## Section 1: Vision and Purpose

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

**Indicators of strength:**

Before working through the reflection prompts on the following pages, record your school's current indicators of strength at KS3. What is already working well?

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**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)

# 1

## Section 1: Vision and Purpose

**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)

**Reflection 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

(1 = fragile / 5 = strong)

# 2

## Section 2: Curriculum Coherence

**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 ●

(1 = fragile / 5 = strong)

# 3

## Section 3: Teaching & Pedagogy

**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 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

(1 = fragile / 5 = strong)

# 4

## Section 4: Assessment for Growth

**Evidence:**

**Next steps:**

# 5

## Section 5: Transition & Continuity

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

**Indicators of strength:**

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

**Reflection prompts:**

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

**Rating:** 1 ● 2 ● 3 ● 4 ● 5 ●

(1 = fragile / 5 = strong)

# 5

## Section 5: Transition & Continuity

**Evidence:**

**Next steps:**

# 6

## Section 6: Leadership & Resourcing

**Core Question:** Is KS3 resourced and led with ambition?

**Indicators of strength:**

- 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 prompts:**

- 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

(1 = fragile / 5 = strong)

# 6

## Section 6: Leadership & Resourcing

**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

(1 = fragile / 5 = strong)

# 7

## Section 7: Student Experience & Voice

**Evidence:**

**Next steps:**

# 8

## Section 8: Pupil Outcomes

**Core Question:** What does our KS3 data tell us about genuine learning and growth?

### Indicators of strength:

- Attainment and progress data at KS3 is tracked and discussed regularly
- Data reflects genuine growth, not just GCSE readiness or predicted grades
- Gaps between pupil groups are identified and acted upon at KS3, not deferred to KS4

### Reflection prompts:

- Does our KS3 data show that students are learning more, knowing more, and remembering more?
- Are we using KS3 data to improve curriculum and teaching, or primarily for accountability?
- Do we know which pupil groups are underserved at KS3, and what are we doing about it?
- Is there a meaningful difference between our Year 7, Year 8 and Year 9 outcomes and do we understand why?

Rating: 1  2  3  4  5

(1 = fragile / 5 = strong)

# 8

## Section 8: Pupil Outcomes

**Evidence:**

**Next steps:**

# 9

## Section 9: Leadership Team Discussion Prompts

### Reflection 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?

### Overall KS3 Ambition rating:

Based on your discussion, how would you rate your school's overall ambition for KS3 right now?

Rating: 1  2  3  4  5

(1 = Wasted Years / 5 = Ambitious Years)

# 9

## Section 9: Leadership Team Discussion Prompts

**Summary of priorities:**

**Our next steps and commitments from this review:**

**We will revisit this toolkit on:**

**Lead responsible:**

# 10

## Section 10: From Wasted Years to The 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.”*

- Mary Myatt



Prepared for:

Senior Leadership Teams | Curriculum Leads | Trust Partners



# Key Stage 3:

The Ambitious Years

**APR 26 - V2**