



The KS3 Self-Evaluation Toolkit

For assessing and developing
years 7-9



Key Stage 3:
The Ambitious Years

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Getting started

This toolkit is for self-assessment and collaborative reflection. It helps senior leaders and teaching teams evaluate and improve standards at Key Stage 3 and supports the transition from wasted years to ambitious years

School:
Completed by:
Role:
Date:

1

Vision and Purpose

Core question: Does KS3 have its own intellectual and developmental purpose in your school?

First, consider your school's current strengths at KS3. What's already working well?

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Prompts for reflection

- How do you celebrate your KS3 success stories?
- Is KS3 seen as a sequel to KS2 or a prequel to GCSEs?
- Do staff, students and governors understand why KS3 matters beyond GCSE preparation?

Rating: 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐

(1 = unclear / 5 = embedded in culture)

1

Vision and Purpose

Evidence:

Next steps:

2

Curriculum Coherence

Core question: Is your KS3 curriculum designed for depth and not just coverage?

Strength indicators

- Curriculum planned from first principles
- Content builds on KS2 foundations
- Rich, challenging material used and is not oversimplified or 'GCSE-lite'

Reflection prompts

- What criteria do you use to judge the quality of curriculum materials?
- Are you repeating content unnecessarily?
- How do you review curriculum sequencing?

Rating: 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐

(1 = fragile / 5 = strong)

2

Curriculum Coherence

Evidence:

Next steps:

3

Teaching and Pedagogy

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

Strength indicators

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

Reflection prompts

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

Rating: 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐

(1 = fragile / 5 = strong)

3

Teaching and Pedagogy

Evidence:

Next steps:

4

Assessment for Growth

Core Question: Does assessment serve learning?

Strength indicators

- Formative assessment shapes lesson and curriculum planning
- Assessment culture builds pupils' confidence
- Data systems support staff understanding and not just accountability

Reflection prompts

- Are you using GCSE-style assessments?
- How do students understand their next steps?
- Are SEND/EAL learners assessed fairly? Can they access the assessment and is it evaluating what teachers want?
- Do you use learner profiles to report full experience within and beyond school lives?

Rating: 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐

(1 = fragile / 5 = strong)

4

Assessment for Growth

Evidence:

Next steps:

5

Transition and Continuity

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

Strength indicators

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

Reflection prompts

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

Rating: 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐

(1 = fragile / 5 = strong)

5

Transition and Continuity

Evidence:

Next steps:

6

Leadership and Resourcing

Core Question: Is KS3 resourced and led with ambition?

Strength indicators

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

Reflection prompts

- How do you 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/teach that here" or "Our kids won't like that"?

Rating: 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐

(1 = fragile / 5 = strong)

6

Leadership and Resourcing

Evidence:

Next steps:

7

Student Experience and Voice

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

Sample questions to ask them

- What's the most interesting thing you've learned recently?
- Do you feel stretched and supported?
- How is KS3 different from primary school?
- Are you being taught content that you already learnt in primary school?
- What helps you learn best?

Rating: 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐

(1 = fragile / 5 = strong)

7

Student Experience and Voice

Evidence:

Next steps:

8

Pupil Outcomes

Core Question: What does your KS3 data tell you about genuine learning and growth?

Strength indicators

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

Rating: 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐

(1 = fragile / 5 = strong)

8

Pupil Outcomes

Evidence:

Next steps:

9

Leadership Team Discussion Prompts

Reflection prompts

- What would a truly ambitious KS3 look and feel like in this school?
- Where does our current curriculum model lack ambition?
- 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 ambition for KS3 right now?

Rating: 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐

(1 = Wasted Years / 5 = Ambitious Years)

9

Leadership Team Discussion Prompts

Summary of priorities

Next steps and commitments

We will revisit this toolkit on

Lead responsible

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

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