

Assessing Dance in Key Stage 3: A Dance Teacher Guide

By Claire Hindley, Dance Education Consultant & Teacher Trainer

Dance education in Key Stage 3 (KS3) is a vital part of the National Curriculum for Physical Education in England. It plays a crucial role in developing students' physical, social, and emotional skills, as well as their creativity and cultural awareness. For teachers and educators, assessing dance at this stage can be a complex task, as it involves evaluating both technical ability and creative expression. In this article, we explore how dance can be assessed in KS3, what it looks like, and the tools that can be used to measure progress. We also examine how assessment aligns with National Curriculum levels.

WHAT DOES DANCE IN KEY STAGE 3 LOOK LIKE?

In Key Stage 3 (ages 11-14), dance lessons are designed to develop students' understanding of movement, rhythm, performance skills, and creative exploration. Dance in this stage generally includes:

- 1. Technique and Performance** – This focuses on developing students' physical abilities, such as control, strength, coordination, balance, and flexibility. Students should be able to perform basic steps, movements, and phrases from different dance genres, including contemporary, hip-hop, ballet, and world dance forms.
- 2. Choreography** – Students are encouraged to create their own dance routines or pieces. They experiment with different movement motifs, structures, and stylistic choices. Choreography also promotes creative expression, allowing students to communicate ideas or emotions through movement.
- 3. Appreciation and Evaluation** – KS3 students learn to observe, critique, and reflect on their own and others' performances. This aspect encourages a deeper understanding of dance as an art form, where students can articulate their responses to different styles and performances.
- 4. Collaboration and Communication** – Dance at KS3 often involves group work, helping students improve their teamwork, communication, and interpersonal skills. Group choreography tasks encourage them to listen to each other's ideas, collaborate on movements, and practice as an ensemble.

HOW TO ASSESS DANCE IN KEY STAGE 3

Assessment of dance at Key Stage 3 is a holistic process, involving both formative and summative methods. Teachers should evaluate technical skills, creativity, communication, and reflection. Below are key areas to focus on for assessment:

1. Skill Development

- **Technique:** Assessing how well students perform specific movements, steps, or sequences. This includes precision, posture, timing, and movement quality. Teachers can assess through observation during practical sessions.
- **Physical Fitness:** Students' stamina, flexibility, strength, and coordination can also be evaluated, as these are fundamental to effective performance.

2. Creative Process

- **Choreographic Skills:** Evaluating how students create and develop their own dances. This could include the exploration of motifs, structures, and how they use space, levels, and dynamics.
- **Expressiveness:** This refers to how well students convey emotion, narrative, or theme through their choreography. Are the movements engaging? Do they align with the intended concept or idea?

3. Performance and Presentation

- **Delivery and Confidence:** Performance assessments should look at how well students express themselves in front of others. This includes their stage presence, energy, and ability to work in a group and/or solo performance.
- **Engagement:** Assessing how students connect with their audience or fellow dancers, considering eye contact, facial expression, and overall engagement.

4. Critical Reflection

- **Self-Assessment and Peer Feedback:** Encouraging students to reflect on their own progress and the work of their peers is crucial for developing critical thinking. Can students identify areas where they need improvement or things they did well?
- **Appreciation of Dance:** Students should be able to articulate what they have learned from their own work and that of others, showing an understanding of dance as a form of communication.

TOOLS FOR ASSESSING DANCE

There are a variety of tools that can be used to assess dance in KS3. These can be both formative and summative.

1. Rubrics

A rubric is a great tool for assessing dance performance, choreography, and technical skills. Rubrics break down the key elements of the assessment into specific criteria, such as technical execution, creativity, group collaboration, and communication. For example, a rubric might assess whether students execute movements with precision or whether they show understanding of dynamics (speed, weight, flow) in their performance.

2. Observation Checklists

Teachers can use observation checklists to monitor students' participation and progress during lessons. This can include assessing their ability to follow instructions, their level of engagement, and their skill development over time.

3. Video Feedback

Recording students' performances allows for detailed feedback. Teachers and students can watch the video together to analyse strengths and areas for improvement. Video feedback is particularly effective for visual learners and offers students the chance to self-reflect.

4. Peer and Self-Assessment

Encouraging students to assess their own work and provide feedback to others is an essential part of the learning process. Peer assessment fosters a collaborative environment where students can learn from each other's strengths and weaknesses. Self-assessment enables students to set personal goals and track their improvement.

5. Written Reflections and Journals

Students can be asked to keep a dance journal where they reflect on their learning, describe their choreographic ideas, or evaluate their performance. This encourages critical thinking and a deeper understanding of their creative process.

DANCE ASSESSMENT AND NATIONAL CURRICULUM LEVELS

In the National Curriculum for Physical Education, assessment is broadly categorised into Key Stages, with each stage having its specific expectations for students' progress. Within KS3, dance can be assessed in relation to the following:

Attainment Levels

- Levels 1–3: Students at this level may demonstrate basic dance skills, limited creative exploration, and an understanding of simple movement patterns. They may need support with technical execution but can engage with basic choreography tasks.
- Levels 4–5: Students will demonstrate clear dance technique, engage creatively in choreography, and show growing confidence in performance. They begin to communicate through movement with a greater sense of expression and control.
- Levels 6–7: At these levels, students show advanced technical ability, creativity in choreography, and strong performance skills. They express emotions, ideas, and concepts clearly through dance and engage in high-level critical reflection on their work.



U.Dance National Festival 2024 by Point of View Photography.

PROGRESSION ACROSS KEY STAGE 3

As students progress through Key Stage 3, they should show improvement in both their technical skills and their creative abilities. By the end of Year 9 (or in some schools Year 8), students should be able to demonstrate competence in dance technique, creativity in choreographic tasks, and confidence in their performances.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Examples of what schools are using to assess their students in Key Stage 3 Dance:

- **Assessment Workbooks:** Used at the end of each unit to track progress and understanding.
- **Focus Areas in Assessment:** Shifting the focus between performance, choreography, and appreciation.
- **Reflection Lessons:** Allocating one lesson after assessments for students to reflect on their work, watch recordings of their performance, and identify areas for improvement.
- **Rubrics and Mark Grids:** Providing clear criteria for teacher assessments and enabling structured peer and self-feedback.
- **Digital and Traditional Tools:** Incorporating Google Forms for quizzes and evaluations, while still offering paper-based alternatives for flexibility.
- **Programme Notes:** Encouraging students to create programme notes to develop analytical skills in preparation for Key Stage 4 qualifications.
- **Creative Write-Ups:** Assigning tasks where students write about their choreography or performance process to deepen their understanding and reflective thinking.
- **Video Assessment:** Using recorded performances to track progress over time and allow students to critique their own work.
- **Peer and Group Discussions:** Facilitating collaborative critique sessions to help students articulate ideas and give constructive feedback.
- **Practical Technique Checklists:** Tracking students' improvement in technical skills like coordination, balance, and dynamics through regular observation.

A combination of these methods can help provide a comprehensive view of student progress while keeping them engaged and motivated. By aligning assessment with the National Curriculum levels, schools can ensure students are developing the skills and knowledge necessary to progress in dance and related fields.

Ultimately, the goal is to foster a love of dance, develop students' physical and creative abilities, and provide them with the tools to express themselves through movement, while ensuring the assessment process works effectively for the school's individual setting.

[HERE](#) is an example of an Assessment sheet used by the Dance Dept at Westgate School, Slough.