

Reflection prompts: Coaching

Introduction

These reflection prompts have been developed to align with the research on coaching and to support leaders of professional learning in making evidence-informed decisions. They highlight the key areas to consider when shaping coaching for your specific school or trust context. The prompts are designed to help leaders think critically about strategy, culture, and the conditions that enable coaching to thrive.

In addition to the research evidence, they are shaped by the Education Endowment Foundation's A School's Guide to Implementation (2024). They reflect the guidance around adopting behaviours that drive effective implementation, attending to contextual factors that influence success, and following a structured but flexible process. The prompts are informed by the EEF's four implementation phases – Explore, Prepare, Deliver, and Sustain – to provide a manageable and sequenced approach. While leaders may wish to consult the EEF guidance directly, its principles are embedded throughout this tool to support thoughtful planning, delivery, and review.

Phase 1: Strategic Alignment & Awareness

- What are the specific teaching and learning challenges coaching could help us address in our school or trust and what data or perspectives support this view?
- Why are we selecting coaching over other forms of professional learning:
 - What makes now the right time?
 - How does it respond to our context?
 - What evidence have we drawn on to assess the feasibility of implementing coaching in our setting?
- How does this align with our school improvement plan, curriculum priorities, or trust-wide professional learning strategy?
- How can we communicate the evidence base (including impact on teachers and pupils) to build awareness and enthusiasm among senior leaders, governors, and teaching staff?
- What barriers (e.g. trust, time, staffing, initiative fatigue) and enablers (e.g. strong professional learning culture, coaching appetite) do we anticipate?
- How will we position coaching as a long-term investment rather than a one-off initiative or quick fix?
- Have we developed a clear, shared understanding across leadership of what coaching is, what it aims to achieve, and how it will work in practice?

Phase 2: Design & Preparation

- What specific outcomes do we want coaching to achieve for teachers and pupils?
How will we make those outcomes visible and meaningful?
- What coaching model will we adopt or adapt and how will we ensure it balances structure (e.g. coaching cycles, shared tools) with flexibility (e.g. adapting to phase, subject, or teacher experience)?
 - What routines, structures, or tools (e.g. coaching cycles, observation templates, feedback rubrics) will support consistent implementation?
- How will we ensure coaching stays anchored in pupil learning, not just teacher confidence or surface-level change?
- How might we protect time for regular observation, feedback, and dialogue, given the pressures on staff?
- How will we adapt coaching for different settings (e.g. early years, small schools, cross-phase teams) to maintain relevance and feasibility?
 - Who will we involve in co-designing the approach so that there is ownership across teams, phases, and career stages?
- How will we use a small-scale pilot to refine our approach before scaling and what indicators will we monitor during that pilot?
 - How will we identify and support a group of credible coaches with the right balance of expertise, relational skill, and contextual understanding?
 - How will we ensure leadership of coaching is distributed and not over-reliant on one or two individuals?

Phase 3: Launch & Communication

- How will we introduce coaching in a way that builds trust and clearly separates it from performance management or appraisal?
 - What messages will we use to build trust, confidence, and agency; especially among those new to or sceptical of coaching?
 - What mechanisms will we use to monitor the process in real time and respond flexibly to feedback from staff?
- How will we brief teachers, support staff, and other stakeholders so that expectations are shared and grounded in the model's core principles?
- What messages will we give to ensure coaching is seen as collaborative, purposeful, and teacher-driven?
 - How will we integrate coaching into existing professional learning and school routines rather than treating it as an add-on?
- How will we build clarity and confidence in the coaching relationship so that teachers understand it is developmental and not evaluative?
- What will we communicate to ensure support staff, experienced teachers, and subject leads all understand whether and how coaching applies to them?

Phase 4: Evaluation & Iteration

- What teacher outcomes (e.g. teaching quality, confidence, reflection) and pupil outcomes do we expect, and how will we measure these realistically?
 - What evidence will give us a meaningful picture of whether coaching is supporting both teaching practice and pupil learning?
- How will we evaluate the quality and consistency of coaching across different year groups or departments?
 - How will we assess whether coaching is improving the quality of instruction and professional confidence?
- How will we capture teacher voice in a way that reflects honest engagement with the process?
 - What tools or forums will we use to involve teachers and coaches in reflective evaluation?
 - How will we ensure the feedback we collect is honest, constructive, and leads to meaningful refinements in delivery?
- What reflection and supervision structures will we provide for coaches themselves, to help them improve and stay aligned to the model?
- How will we review and refine the coaching model regularly, without losing coherence or clarity?

Phase 5: Scaling & Embedding

- Before scaling or continuing coaching, how will we review what has been achieved and whether it's worth sustaining?
- How will we grow internal expertise so that coaching doesn't rely on external partners or temporary funding?
- What development or CPD do our coaches need to maintain credibility, develop feedback skills, and support reflective dialogue?
- How will we phase expansion to include more teachers without compromising quality?
- How can we ensure equitable access to coaching across roles and career stages, including support staff and experienced practitioners?
- How will we keep coaching aligned with evolving school priorities so that it remains meaningful, not marginal?
- As we expand coaching, how will we sustain the quality of the coaching relationship so that trust and collaboration remain central?

Full reference: National Institute of Teaching. (2025). *The NIoT Evidence Toolkit*.

<http://evidenceportal.niot.org.uk/toolkit>