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a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

**A report on
Ysgol Eifionydd
Porthmadog
Gwynedd
LL49 9HS**

Date of inspection: October 2011

by

Mr Gwyn Thomas

Under Contract For

**Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**

During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the school's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

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Context

Ysgol Eifionydd is a naturally bilingual school for boys and girls between 11 and 16 years of age and is maintained by Gwynedd Unitary Authority. The school is situated in the centre of Porthmadog and serves the towns of Porthmadog and Cricieth and the surrounding rural areas.

The school accepts pupils of all abilities.

There are 431 pupils on the school's roll. During the previous inspection in October 2005, there were 534 pupils on roll. Coleg Meirion Dwyfor is responsible for providing post-16 education in the area.

The school has 28.53 full-time equivalent teaching staff and nine full-time equivalent support staff.

In 2010-11, 8% of pupils were entitled to free school meals. This figure is well below the national average of 17.4%.

Two per cent of the pupils have statements of special educational needs and there are a further 16% who require additional support. Of the pupils who are of compulsory school age, 18% are on the special educational needs' register, which is below the national average of 20.2%

Sixty-eight per cent of pupils come from Welsh speaking homes. Ninety-eight per cent sit the Welsh first language examination at the end of key stage 4.

Following a period of instability, the current headteacher was appointed to her post in January 2010. During the previous inspection, she was the deputy headteacher. The acting assistant headteacher was appointed in September 2010.

The school aims to ensure education of the highest standard, so that pupils develop into responsible and mature individuals and can become full and active members of a bilingual society.

In 2010-11 the individual school budget per pupil for Ysgol Eifionydd is £4350 which compares with the maximum of £5024 and a minimum of £3965 for secondary schools in Gwynedd. The school has the tenth highest budget per pupil of the 14 secondary schools in Gwynedd.

Summary

The school's current performance	Adequate
The school's prospects for improvement	Good

Current performance

This is a good school because of the:

- outstanding leadership of the headteacher;
- significant improvement in results at key stage 3 over the last year;
- school's inclusive ethos and the broad and balanced curriculum;
- care and guidance of high standard; and
- fact that each pupil leaves school with a qualification.

The school's current performance is judged to be adequate because of the:

- satisfactory performance in English, mathematics and science, especially in key stage 4;
- standard of teaching in a significant minority of lessons;
- difference between the performance of boys and girls, specifically in Welsh first language and English;
- attendance in key stage 4; and
- inconsistency in the marking of pupils' books.

Prospects for improvement

The schools prospects for improvement are judged to be good because of the:

- headteacher's outstanding vision;
- strong and clear strategic leadership by the headteacher and senior management team, which is based on thorough self-evaluation processes;
- sound understanding by most heads of department of how to develop the school's clear vision in relation to raising standards;
- sound arrangements for monitoring lessons and reaching judgements on the quality of the teaching and learning;
- sound systems for monitoring the budget to ensure effective planning for the future;
- support and dedication of the governors in ensuring continuous improvement;
- outstanding support arranged by the local authority; and
- detailed and thorough planning to raise standards.

Recommendations

In order to improve further, the staff and governors at Ysgol Eifionydd need to:

- R1 continue to raise standards across the subjects and specifically in English, mathematics and science;
- R2 continue to develop the skills, and focus specifically on developing literacy across the curriculum;
- R3 raise the standards of teaching from adequate to good or better;
- R4 embed assessment for learning further through sharing good practice;
- R5 develop the effectiveness of special education needs provision through clearer definition of the role of the co-ordinator and strengthen the co-ordination across the curriculum; and
- R6 ensure continuity and progression in learning between key stages 2 and 3 by developing the curricular transition processes.

All these recommendations are reflected in the school's development plan.

What happens next?

The school will prepare an action plan that shows how it will address the recommendations. Progress in addressing the recommendations will be monitored by Estyn.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Adequate

Standards: Adequate

At key stage 3, the school's performance over a three-year period is below the average when compared with similar schools. However, all indicators have improved steadily over this period. In 2011, Welsh first language or English, mathematics and science combined (the core subject indicator) and Welsh first language and mathematics as separate subjects are in the top half of similar schools. English and science are in the bottom half. Performance in the non-core subjects has improved significantly. Pupils' progress from the previous key stage has improved in the core subject indicator and core subjects.

In key stage 4 in 2011, the provisional data indicates that the school performs well in the average wider points score which includes all externally approved qualifications at age 15. In the threshold level 2 indicator (a volume of learning equivalent to five GCSEs at grades A*-C) including English or Welsh first language and mathematics, the school's performance has improved over the last three years. However, it is well below the average when compared with similar schools. Performance in English, mathematics and science is also well below that in similar schools.

When compared with their performance in the previous key stage, pupils make marginally better progress than expected in the threshold level 2 including English or Welsh first language and mathematics. However, the expected progress in the threshold level 2 indicators and the core subject indicator had been restricted by the low standards achieved by pupils in English, mathematics and science.

Overall, boys' performance is significantly lower than girls especially in English and Welsh first language in both key stages. This difference has impacted negatively on several key indicators in key stage 4.

Pupils entitled to free school meals do not achieve as well as non free-school-meals pupils in key stage 3. This is in line with the national trend. The difference between the two groups has narrowed in key stage 4 except in the threshold level 2 including English or Welsh first language and mathematics. Pupils with additional learning needs achieve as expected.

Overall, the progress made by pupils in lessons is variable. In the majority of lessons where teaching is good or better, pupils' progress and standards are good. Pupils apply previous learning well and are able to master new concepts. In the significant minority of lessons where learning activities are not challenging, progress is slow and standards are only adequate.

Most pupils listen well to their teachers and to each other. Standards in reading are variable. However, pupils read well to each other in pairs. The majority of pupils can identify key features in texts and select evidence to support their viewpoints. The majority of pupils make spoken contributions of good quality in class but a minority of pupils are not confident to do so.

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Able pupils write extensively and well. However, a minority of pupils, particularly boys, do not write accurately enough. Work is poorly presented and includes too many errors. Spelling and punctuation mistakes are evident frequently.

Pupils in key stage 3 do not use their numeracy skills sufficiently across the curriculum. In contrast, information and communication technology skills are good throughout the school and are used extensively. Many pupils in Year 9 and in key stage 4 have gained qualifications at level 2 in this essential skill. The majority of pupils in Year 11 have achieved a level 2 essential skills' qualification in communication and numeracy. In key stage 4 in 2011, standards in these skills have impacted very positively on the threshold level 2 indicators and the average wider points' score.

Pupils achieve good standards in Welsh first language in both key stages. In key stage 3, results have risen consistently over the last three years and are above the national average. The percentage of pupils gaining a level 5 and above was 88% in 2011.

In key stage 4, nearly all pupils are entered for the Welsh first language GCSE course. Over the last three years, nearly 70% of pupils gained the A*-C grade. This success rate is matched quite closely in Welsh literature. Nearly all pupils use their bilingual skills very effectively. Pupils' communication skills are particularly strong. Evidence of good quality in both Welsh first language and English is used well to gain a level 2 qualification in communication skills.

Wellbeing: Good

Most pupils feel safe in school and receive good personal support. Most feel that the school deals effectively with the few incidents of bullying. Most understand the importance of healthy living with pleasing numbers participating in physical activities including the 5x60 initiative and the popular climbing wall. Participation in fitness, sporting and related extra-curricular activities is good.

Many pupils are considerate, courteous and behave well. Most pupils behave appropriately in the narrow corridors. However, there are a very few pupils in both key stages that do not behave appropriately in class. Over the last three years, only one pupil has been permanently excluded. Fixed-term exclusions are very low.

Attendance rates have improved over the last three years. Attendance is the same as the national average of 91.4% for 2010-2011. However, compared with similar schools, it is well below the average because of the non attendance of a very few pupils in key stage 4. Attendance in key stage 3 is very good. Throughout the school, most pupils are punctual to lessons.

Pupils' involvement in community activities and events is good. Many are successfully involved in projects within the town and raise substantial sums of money for several charities. These pupils gain valuable levels of experience and confidence.

Pupils make a valuable contribution to school life through the school council, the nutrition group and pupil questionnaires.

In the majority of lessons observed, pupils work well with each other. The majority have positive attitudes to work. Pupils in key stage 4 support younger pupils through the very successful buddy system.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Good
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Learning experiences: Good

The school provides an effective curriculum. In key stage 3 it ensures that adequate time is given to cover national curriculum and religious education requirements. The collaboration to ensure consistency in transition in curricular provision with primary partner schools is adequate.

The school offers a comprehensive range of general and vocational courses in key stage 4 which respond well to local employers needs. All pupils have the opportunity to gain qualifications. The school has responded well to the Learning Pathways (14-19) initiative. A productive and successful partnership exists with other partnership schools in the area and the college. The school far exceeds the requirements of the Learning and Skills' (Wales) Measure. A suitable curriculum is available to pupils with additional learning needs. The more able and talented pupils have opportunities to gain additional qualifications and opportunities to attend master classes at Bangor University. Pupils follow the Welsh Baccalaureate qualification, successfully enhancing formal and informal pupil experiences, and providing appropriate routes for further qualifications.

The school ensures that most pupils follow their preferred choice of study at key stage 4. Through close links with Gyrfa Cymru, it prepares and guides the pupils well for making their subject choices.

The variety of extra curricular activities is good. The school offers sporting and musical opportunities, a range of worthwhile visits, an extensive variety of Urdd activities and several fund raising projects.

The delivery of key skills in key stages 3 and 4 is good. Information communications technology provision is good. Provision in numeracy is good. Opportunities for pupils to secure Essential Skills Qualifications are particularly appropriate.

Provision for literacy is adequate. The implementation and monitoring of literacy across the curriculum is satisfactory.

Welsh language provision is excellent across the school. Nearly all pupils are entered for the Welsh First Language course. The Welsh ethos within the school is exemplary, and the Welsh dimension within lesson plans reinforces the positive attitude displayed by the school towards the Welsh language and dimension.

Provision for education sustainable development and global citizenship is developing well. The school is working towards the silver award as part of the Cynllun Ysgolion Gwyrdd Gwynedd. Curricular areas are raising awareness of global issues and this year a pupil from the school was chosen as climate change champion for the National Assembly of Wales. Global citizenship is developing.

Teaching: Adequate

Within the lessons observed, the majority of teachers deliver good lessons, and use their subject knowledge effectively to inform their planning. A good range of teaching strategies is employed, with good pace and challenge in lessons. In the very few outstanding lessons seen, teachers have very high expectations, they fully engage pupils with a range of highly imaginative activities, and ensure that the teaching has a positive impact on learning.

In a minority of lessons there are important shortcomings. Pupils do not make sufficient progress because of lack of challenge in lessons, low expectations and low level disruption by a very few pupils.

The quality and regularity of marking varies between and within departments. In the best examples, notably the Welsh department, books are marked regularly with informative comments given to pupils on how to improve. However, in around half the books sampled, marking is superficial, and there is too much missing or incomplete work.

Assessment for learning is developing. However there are inconsistencies in its adoption across the school.

Pupils are well informed about their progress and the majority know their current levels of attainment. There is an easily accessible and consistent tracking system which ensures consistency in identifying under achievement and ensuring that strategies to remedy the situation are implemented. The full impact of the positive mentoring system in Year 10 is yet to be seen on standards in the subjects.

Reports to parents are of good quality and provide comprehensive information. Parents receive two interim and an end-of-year report on academic progress and termly reports on behaviour effort and punctuality. Nearly all comments and targets for improvement from subject teachers in the end of year reports are subject specific, and valuable for both pupils and their parents. The report provides a valuable space for parental comment.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The inclusive ethos of the school promotes positive attitudes and values. Most pupils and parents state that the school is a safe and caring community.

The school provides a particularly good level of care and wellbeing for its pupils. Their emotional and behavioural needs are well supported by extensive partnerships with a range of external agencies. Specialist support provided by the school is targeted clearly and leads to improvement in standards, attitude, behaviour, confidence and wellbeing of certain groups of pupils.

Learning experiences promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. Personal and social education provision is planned well and is beneficial in promoting the health and wellbeing of pupils.

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Good quality careers education and guidance, including the world of work programme, enables pupils to make well-informed decisions about their personal and academic development and career choices.

The school council plays an active part in school life.

The school is effective in identifying and monitoring the progress of pupils with SEN. It has appropriate processes in place for reviewing progress. Pupils benefit from a team of support workers with a wide variety of expertise which has a positive effect on learning. The school provides good reading support for targeted pupils. All pupils have full access to the curriculum.

Opportunities for able and talented pupils are improving.

The school has an appropriate policy and suitable procedures for safeguarding.

Learning environment: Good

The school has an inclusive ethos and everyone is treated well. Pupils feel safe and secure, and they benefit from good levels of care. Assemblies and personal and social education lessons ensure that pupils engage positively with multiculturalism and diversity. Pupils have equal opportunities to access the curriculum and extra-curricular activities. They meet statutory requirements in relation to an Equality and Disability Plan and Accessibility

Accommodation is sufficient for the number of pupils. The general teaching areas and specialist rooms are of good quality. Resources are matched to pupils' needs. Displays on the corridors and classrooms support learning and celebrate achievement. The school and recreational areas are well maintained.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Good
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Leadership: Excellent

The headteacher has been very successful in securing widespread support for her vision for the future of the school. She has led the school exceptionally well through a particularly difficult period. Through developing effective teamwork and increased accountability for all she has begun to bring about significant improvements in a very short time with the support of her staff. This is an outstanding achievement. She has been ably assisted by her acting assistant headteacher.

Since her appointment in January 2010, she has identified areas that needed urgent attention and taken firm, appropriate and very effective action to address them. The school has re-modelled the curriculum and improved course provision through collaboration with other providers. This has improved the provision for pupils very significantly. Most middle managers now have a clear understanding of their roles and carry them out with increasing efficiency and commitment. Procedures for department review, self-evaluation and development planning are good.

The governing body is well-informed and strongly supports the work of the senior leadership team. Members of the governing body have received training in the use

of data and gained an increased understanding of the school's performance. An appropriate range of committees now addresses different issues and as a result, governors are more effective as supporters and critical friends of the school.

The school takes appropriate account of local and national priorities, including Learning Pathways 14-19, encouraging healthy eating and improving skills including the ability to work bilingually.

Improving quality: Good

Self-evaluation and planning for improvement are developing strengths of the school and the first cycle of this process has just been completed. The headteacher has established a system of self-review that draws heavily on a range of first-hand performance data. She has established a culture whereby teachers are increasingly confident in using pupil attainment data to judge the effectiveness of their provision. They also use extensive lesson observations and the examination of pupils' work to identify the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Good use is made of outside agencies to confirm and validate the school's judgements. Consequently, there is a clear focus throughout the school on raising standards.

At the whole-school level, planning for improvement is good and the school's development plan identifies clear priorities and targets. It identifies the strategies to be followed, allocates resources, time scales and responsibilities, and identifies clearly success criteria. Planning for development by middle managers mirrors the whole-school approach, but is less well developed.

The headteacher has encouraged many teachers to work with colleagues at Ysgol Eifionydd and other schools to develop and share their professional knowledge. This is beginning to have an effect for example in how they plan to develop pupils' essential skills.

The school has addressed most of the recommendations from the last inspection. However, there has been insufficient progress in raising standards in English, mathematics and science.

Partnership working: Good

The school works well with other schools and colleges to extend the range of courses in key stage 4. There are effective quality assurance procedures in place. These courses impact positively on pupils' standards, wellbeing and behaviour.

Links with local businesses and employers are a strength and provide valuable extended work-experience opportunities. There is good collaboration between schools in planning and producing resources for the world-of-work curriculum.

Pupils benefit from strong and sustained links with a wide range of multi-disciplinary agencies and community partners. This is an area of particular strength within the school and promotes social inclusion.

Pastoral links with primary partner schools are strong and ensure that pupils settle in well to their new environment.

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Communication with parents is developing effectively. Parents receive frequent updates on their child's progress. There are good links with teacher training institutions.

Resource management: Adequate

The school manages its resources well. The headteacher and administrative officer control and manage the budget effectively, and spending is planned and monitored carefully. The governors' finance committee maintains a regular and rigorous oversight of financial decisions.

The school has sufficient teachers and they are deployed appropriately. Senior managers identify teachers' professional development needs well by using performance-management arrangements and lesson observations.

The school meets statutory requirements relating to the national agreement on 'Raising Standards and Tackling Workload.

However, since the standards pupils achieve and the quality of teaching are adequate, overall, the school gives adequate value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Standards: Adequate

In key stage 3 over the last three years, the core subject indicator and all the individual core subjects have improved consistently. The greatest improvement had been in science.

In 2011, the core subject indicator and mathematics were in the top quarter when compared with similar schools in terms of the free school meal benchmark. Welsh first language was in the top half. English and science were in the bottom half. This was an improvement on the previous two years when nearly all of the indicators were either in the bottom half or quarter when compared with similar schools in terms of the free-school-meal benchmark.

In 2011, results in the core subject indicator and mathematics at level 5 or above placed the school above the family averages (groups of schools with similar proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals, living in deprived areas, having SEN and learning English as an additional language). Welsh first language, English and science were below. However, all four core subjects and the core subject indicator were above the national averages.

Over a three-year period at level 6 and above, results varied in Welsh first language, English and mathematics. There was a rising trend in science. Compared with similar schools in terms of the free school meal benchmark in 2011, only Welsh first language was in the top quarter. The other core subjects were in the bottom half.

During 2009-2011, pupils' achievement at levels 5, 6 and 7 in science was consistently below the family average for the three years.

Between 2009 and 2011 pupils' achievement at level 5 and above in the non-core subjects had improved significantly. In 2011, results in eight of the non-core subjects placed the school in the top half when compared with similar schools in terms of the free school meal benchmark. Five subjects had been in the bottom quarter in 2009 and 2010.

In 2011, pupils had made better than expected progress in the core subject indicator and Welsh first language based on their attainment at the end of key stage 2. Expected progress had been made in English, mathematics and science.

At key stage 4 (2011 data is provisional) pupils' performance in most of the threshold and wider points score indicators had risen over a three-year period from 2009-2011. The threshold level 2 including English or Welsh first language and mathematics had risen by 13 percentage points. However, this indicator remains in the bottom quarter when compared with similar schools in terms of the free-school-meal benchmark. The average wider points score had improved consistently and in 2011 was in the top half compared with similar schools. The school was nearly always below the family averages during 2009-2011.

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During 2009-2011, pupils' performance in English, Welsh first language and science level 2 (GCSE grades A*-C) had been variable. However, mathematics had risen consistently. Overall, excluding Welsh first language, the other three core subjects were in the bottom quarter when compared with similar schools in terms of the free-school-meal benchmark. These three core subjects had a negative impact on a number of key indicators.

In 2011, pupils had made slightly better progress than expected in the threshold level 2 including English or Welsh first language and mathematics, the core subject indicator and the threshold level 1 (a volume of learning equivalent to five GCSEs at grades D-G) based on attainment at the end of key stage 3. However, the expected increase in the level 2 threshold indicators and the core subject indicator were limited by the low standards achieved by pupils in English, mathematics and science.

At the end of Year 11 during 2009-2011, all pupils left school with a recognised qualification. This was better than the national average for this period. Most pupils continued their full-time education in school, further education or in work-based training. Of those Year 11 pupils who left school in summer 2011, 2% are not in education, training or employment. Overall, these are good features.

Contrary to national trends, during 2009-2011, boys outperform girls on a very few occasions in key stage 3 and key stage 4. In key stage 3, girls perform better than boys over a three-year period at level 5+ in all the four core subjects. There is a significant and widening difference in performance greater than the family and national averages in the core subject indicator. However, at level 7 in science, boys consistently outperform girls.

In key stage 4, contrary to national trends, boys perform better than girls at level 1 threshold. Over a three-year period, girls do much better than boys in Welsh first language and English. There is a significant difference of over 20 percentage points between the performance of boys and girls. This is greater than the national averages. The gap between boys and girls in science and mathematics is widening and is greater than the national average.

Pupils with additional learning needs and the very few looked after children make sound progress relative to their ability. Pupils with weak basic skills make good progress.

In key stage 3, the gap between the performance of pupils entitled to free school meals and those not entitled is increasing in the core subject indicator. In key stage 4, the performance of free school meals pupils in the core subject indicator, thresholds level 1 and level 2 is improving. However, the gap is widening in the threshold level 2 including English or Welsh first language and mathematics.

Appendix 2

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

Estyn received 21 responses to the parent questionnaires. This is a low return. However, many gave positive responses to many questions.

Most parents are satisfied with the school and feel that their children were helped to settle in to a new school where they are happy and safe. Parents believe that there is a good range of extra-curricular activities available.

Many parents say their children are making good progress as expectations are high. They are kept informed of their child's progress. Pupils are treated fairly. Many are able to approach the school on any issue. Many state their children are developed to become more mature and take on responsibility. Pupils are encouraged to be healthy and take regular exercise. However, many parents express concern about pupils' behaviour.

The majority state that good advice is given to their children in readiness to move to their next school, college or work and that homework is appropriate. The majority of parents say the school is run well.

Just over a half state that teaching is good with additional support being available.

Responses to learner questionnaires

Estyn received responses from 95 pupils. The views of the boys and girls were nearly identical.

All pupils state that they feel safe in the school where there are many opportunities to get regular exercise.

Most have enough resources and are doing well. Teachers support pupils to learn and make progress. There is always someone to talk to if there are concerns. Most are encouraged to do things for themselves and be responsible for their own actions. Pupils are respected and treated fairly. They are also helped to understand and respect others. Most know how to keep healthy. Most are satisfied by the way they are prepared for life after school.

Many were given good advice when choosing their subjects. Many pupils believe the school listens to their views and that the school deals well with bullying. Many regularly believe that homework helps them to understand and improve their work. Good advice was given when choosing courses in key stage 4.

The majority of pupils are of the opinion that pupils' behaviour in class is good.

Appendix 3

The inspection team

Gwyn Thomas	Reporting Inspector
Bethan Whittall	Team Inspector
David Hughes	Team Inspector
Gwynoro Jones	Lay Inspector
Anne Morris	Peer Inspector
Alwen Watkin	School Nominee

Copies of the report

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Year groups and key stages

Schools use a common system of numbering year groups from the start of compulsory schooling to 18 years of age. This system emphasises the importance of continuity and eases communication among schools, governing bodies, parents and LEAs.

The term 'Reception' (R) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of five during the academic year. Year 1 refers to the year group of pupils who reach the age of six during the academic year and so on. Year 13 is the year group of students who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

Year	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Ages	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11

Secondary phase:

Year	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13
Ages	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18

The four key stages cover the following year groups:

Key stage 1	Year 1 and Year 2
Key stage 2	Year 3 to Year 6
Key stage 3	Year 7 to Year 9
Key stage 4	Year 10 and Year 11