



**ST BERNARD'S
HIGH SCHOOL**

Curriculum Guide

Photography

2025 - 26



Contents

Curriculum Intent	3
Year 12	4
Year 13	6

Curriculum Intent

Our Photography Curriculum is rooted in the values of Catholic Social Teaching. The course encourages students to view their artistic practice as a means of fostering respect for themselves and others. Students are invited to explore their identity, articulate their beliefs, and respond thoughtfully to cultural, environmental, and ethical issues. Through their creative journey, they develop compassion, dignity, and a deeper understanding of the human experience, recognising the importance of respecting diverse perspectives and promoting social justice. We intend to achieve this by:

- **Fostering diverse photographic skills:** Developing proficiency in exposure across a broad range of techniques from traditional darkroom processes to digital postproduction and the moving image.
- **Cultivating critical understanding:** Equipping students to analyse, interpret, and evaluate photographic images from various historical periods, cultural contexts, and global perspectives, including the contributions of diverse photographers and film makers.
- **Promoting personal expression and voice:** Providing opportunities for students to explore their own ideas, emotions, and experiences through photography, developing their unique artistic voice and building confidence in communicating visually.
- **Encouraging innovative thinking:** Challenging students to experiment, take risks, and learn from mistakes, fostering resilience and adaptability in their creative journeys.
- **Connecting photography to the wider world:** Demonstrating the relevance of the photographic image in society, its impact on culture, and its potential as a pathway for future education and career opportunities.

Head of Arts & Technologies Faculty

Mrs Stanborough

Head of Art Department

Mrs Every

Year 12

A Level Photography is a vibrant and thought-provoking course designed to nurture confident, independent, and reflective image makers. Throughout the course, students engage in practical exploration, critical analysis, and personal expression, developing both technical skills and creative insight. Guided by the AQA Art and Design A Level Specification, the course comprises of 60% coursework (Component 1) and 40% externally set assignment (Component 2).

The course begins with a series of skills-based workshops focusing on the question ‘What is Photography?’ Students investigate how image makers use light and the visual elements—such as line, shape, repetition, rhythm, balance, composition—to communicate ideas. These workshops aim to build confidence in the manipulation of light and camera exposure. This initial phase promotes creative freedom, problem-solving, and respect for both photographic traditions and innovation, embodying the CST principles of respect by valuing diverse approaches and encouraging students to consider how their work can inspire others.

Personal Investigation (Component 1 – 60%)

Building on the skills developed in the workshops, students embark on a Personal Investigation—an in-depth, self-directed project centred around a theme of their choosing. This process is supported by an extended essay that explores influential photographers, relevant concepts, and cultural contexts that inform their work. This component provides a meaningful opportunity for students to connect their personal interests with broader global and ethical issues, such as human dignity, social inequality, and the role of the photographer in promoting justice and understanding. Through this exploration, students learn to use their creativity as a tool for service and advocacy, fostering respect for diverse perspectives and encouraging thoughtful engagement with the world around them.

Assessment Objectives (AQA):

AO1 – Develop ideas informed by research and contextual understanding

AO2 – Refine work through materials, processes, and techniques

AO3 – Record ideas using drawing and other visual methods

AO4 – Present a personal and meaningful final outcome(s)

Number of lessons per fortnight: 5

Skills developed: In the early stages of the course, students are introduced to core photographic skills and working methods. These include, approaches to developing ideas through exploring photographic exposure, annotation, and contextual study. The handling of traditional processes, digital manipulation techniques and how to critically engage with the work of photographers and photography movements. This variety ensures that students can develop a distinctive and personal approach to their work.

Essential equipment: 16GB Memory Card (including protective case), A4 pack of photo paper, fine tipped permanent marker, A4 ring binder and sleeves, A4 display folder.

Desirable equipment: Digital - DSLR camera, tripod and card reader. Darkroom - multigrade photo paper, 35mm film, and sun printing paper.

Extracurricular and enrichment opportunities: Photography walks and Gallery visits in the local area and London, relevant to the studies and developments of the group, as work progresses.

Careers curriculum: A Level Photography Art equips students for progression to foundation, university, or creative courses. Or careers in areas such as photojournalism, portraiture, commercial, scientific, and advertising.

	Content studied	
Autumn Term	What is Photography – An inquiry project to support development of skills	<p>The use of cameras, film, lenses, filters and lighting</p> <p>Pinhole photography</p> <p>Darkroom techniques, developing, printing, and presentation</p> <p>Safe working practices</p>

	Content studied (continued)		
Spring Term	Personal Investigation (Component 1 – 60%)	Aspects of digital media including appropriate use of the internet and Artificial Intelligence	
Summer Term		Evaluate relevant critical and contextual material Explore and respond to a variety of contextual sources Develop ideas from sources in a personal way making connections with others Refine ideas, make choices, and develop outcomes Presenting and Installation Evidence the four assessment objectives	
Literacy Focus	VISUAL Literacy	WRITTEN Literacy	
	Analysing and interpreting the visual elements and how they are used to create meaning. Critically examining images, understanding how photographers use the visual elements and techniques to convey ideas and messages. Contextualising Photography by exploring the historical, social, cultural, and personal contexts that influence the creation and interpretation of photographic images.	Using specific terminology to describe and analyse photographic images effectively in a scholarly manner. Articulate understanding of visual elements, techniques, and concepts through clear and concise written analysis. An Extended Essay requiring students to delve deeper into a chosen topic, research it, and present findings in a well-structured and academically sound manner.	
What parents can do to help	1. Creating a Supportive Environment: A quiet, well-lit dedicated study space where your child can focus Encourage Independence by encouraging them to explore solutions themselves and develop problem-solving skills Support time management by helping them create a realistic study schedule that includes dedicated time for taking photos	2. Fostering Independent Learning: Encourage Exploration by providing them with a variety of, books, and online resources to inspire creativity Promote Critical Thinking by encouraging them to analyse their own work and the work of others Remind them to embrace mistakes is a natural part of the learning process	3. Understanding the Subject: Research the Course , it's specification and the different components of the course Explore Visual Elements together to enhance their understanding of photography Encourage visits to galleries to broaden their knowledge of different styles and techniques

Wider reading – Conceptual, Contextual and Historical:

- Understanding a Photograph by John Berger
- On Photography by Susan Sontag
- Isms, Understanding Photography by Emma Lewis
- Truth Beauty: Pictorialism and the Photograph as Art, 1845-1945 by Alison Nordstrom
- The Women Who Changed Photography: And How to Master Their Techniques by Laurence King

Wider reading – Skills and techniques:

- The Photographer's Eye: Composition and Design for Better Digital Photographs by Michael Freeman
- Perfect Exposure by Michael Freeman
- The Photographer's Story: The Art of Visual Narrative by Michael Freeman
- The Darkroom Cookbook by Steve Anchell

Websites and Research:

- Preparing for the Personal Study - PHOTOPEDAGOGY
- This is Colossal: Explore contemporary art, craft, photography, and the natural world.
- Lens Culture
- BJP Online

Year 13

Component 1: Sustained Project (Coursework – 60%)

In Year 13, students continue to develop their personal investigation. They are encouraged to make thoughtful, informed, and meaningful choices, resulting in a body of work that demonstrates their intellectual and emotional engagement. Progress across the four assessment objectives will continue to be shown through a digital portfolio, development pieces, and a final outcome, or series of outcomes, created under exam conditions. Each objective supports CST by emphasising the importance of inquiry, the dignity of self-expression, and the responsibility to contribute positively to culture and community. More broadly, it helps young people become visually literate and confident in using creativity to pursue truth, a value that is central to Catholic education and modern society.

Component 2: Externally Set Assignment (ESA – 40%)

In the final stage of the course, students respond to a theme set by the exam board. This Externally Set Assignment (ESA) includes a preparatory period and a final 15-hour practical exam, during which students create a resolved piece. The open-ended nature of the task allows students to respond in a way that reflects their voice, their values, and their artistic growth.

The course helps students grow as reflective, compassionate, and culturally aware individuals, capable of using creativity as a force for positive expression and social understanding—values at the heart of Catholic education.

Number of lessons per fortnight: 5

Skills developed: In Year 13, students will continue to develop their personal investigation by revisiting and refining their skills and working methods. They will enhance their ability to generate ideas through exploring photographic exposure, traditional processes, and digital manipulation techniques. Additionally, students will critically engage with the work of renowned photographers and photography movements, helping them deepen their understanding of visual language.

Essential equipment: 16GB Memory Card (including protective case), A4 pack of photo paper, fine tipped permanent marker, A4 ring binder and sleeves, A4 display folder.

Desirable equipment: Digital - DSLR camera, tripod and card reader. Darkroom - multigrade photo paper, 35mm film, and sun printing paper.

Extracurricular and enrichment opportunities: Photography walks and Gallery visits in the local area and London, relevant to the studies and developments of the group, as work progresses.

Careers curriculum: A Level Photography Art equips students for progression to foundation, university, or creative courses. Or careers in areas such as photojournalism, portraiture, commercial, scientific, and advertising.

	Content studied	
Autumn Term	Personal Investigation (Component 1 – 60%) 5-hour mock exam	Explore and investigate different ways of working. Record from a range of observations in response to a theme, using the formal elements and principles of design.
Spring Term	Externally set assignment Exam 40% of the overall qualification 15-hour exam	Select, experiment and use a variety of techniques and processes
Summer Term		Explore and respond to a variety of contextual sources
		Develop ideas from sources in a personal way making connections with others
		Refine ideas, make choices, develop opportunities for outcomes
		Evidence the four assessment objectives

Literacy Focus	VISUAL Literacy		WRITTEN Literacy	
	<p>Analysing and interpreting the visual elements and how they are used to create meaning.</p> <p>Critically examining images, understanding how photographers use the visual elements and techniques to convey ideas and messages.</p> <p>Contextualising Photography by exploring the historical, social, cultural, and personal contexts that influence the creation and interpretation of photographic images.</p>		<p>Using specific terminology to describe and analyse photographic images effectively in a scholarly manner.</p> <p>Articulate understanding of visual elements, techniques, and concepts through clear and concise written analysis.</p> <p>An Extended Essay requiring students to delve deeper into a chosen topic, research it, and present findings in a well-structured and academically sound manner.</p>	
What parents can do to help	<p>1. Creating a Supportive Environment:</p> <p>A quiet, well-lit dedicated study space where your child can focus</p> <p>Encourage Independence by encouraging them to explore solutions themselves and develop problem-solving skills</p> <p>Support time management by helping them create a realistic study schedule that includes dedicated time for taking photos</p>	<p>2. Fostering Independent Learning:</p> <p>Encourage Exploration by providing them with a variety of, books, and online resources to inspire creativity</p> <p>Promote Critical Thinking by encouraging them to analyse their own work and the work of others</p> <p>Remind them to embrace mistakes is a natural part of the learning process</p>	<p>3. Understanding the Subject:</p> <p>Research the Course, it's specification and the different components of the course</p> <p>Explore Visual Elements together to enhance their understanding of photography</p> <p>Encourage visits to galleries to broaden their knowledge of different styles and techniques</p>	

Wider reading – Conceptual, Contextual and Historical:

- Understanding a Photograph by John Berger
- About Looking by John Berger
- The Photography by Graham Clarke
- On Photography by Susan Sontag
- Photography Changes Everything by y Marvin Heiferman (Author), Merry A. Foresta
- Photography : A Cultural History by Mary Warner Marien
- The Women Who Changed Photography: And How to Master Their Techniques by Laurence King

Wider reading – Skills and techniques:

- The Art of Photography: A Personal Approach to Artistic Expression by Bruce Barnbaum
- The Photographer's Eye: Composition and Design for Better Digital Photographs by Michael Freeman
- The Photographer's Story: The Art of Visual Narrative by Michael Freeman
- Why It Does Not Have to be in Focus: Modern Photography Explained by Jackie Higgins
- Experimental Photography: A Handbook of Techniques by Luca Bendandi

Websites and Research:

- Preparing for the Personal Study - PHOTOPEDAGOGY
- Colossal: Explore contemporary art, craft, photography, and the natural world.
- Google Arts & Culture
- ART2DAY - home
- Home - National Portrait Gallery
- Lens Culture
- BJP Online