

school
matters
special edition

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foreword

A great deal of things happen on our campus.

Some matters are objectively noteworthy; we feel their impact tangibly and undeniably, such as the *update of our uniform regulations* or the *new single CCA system*. Their controversy propels significant discourse, and the noise they generate makes them almost impossible to ignore.

But some matters unfold more quietly, their impact either limited to a smaller group, like the *members of the recently merged CCAs*, or simply experienced more subtly across the student body, as with the *school's rewilding initiative* or the *school's shift away from a grades-centric culture*.

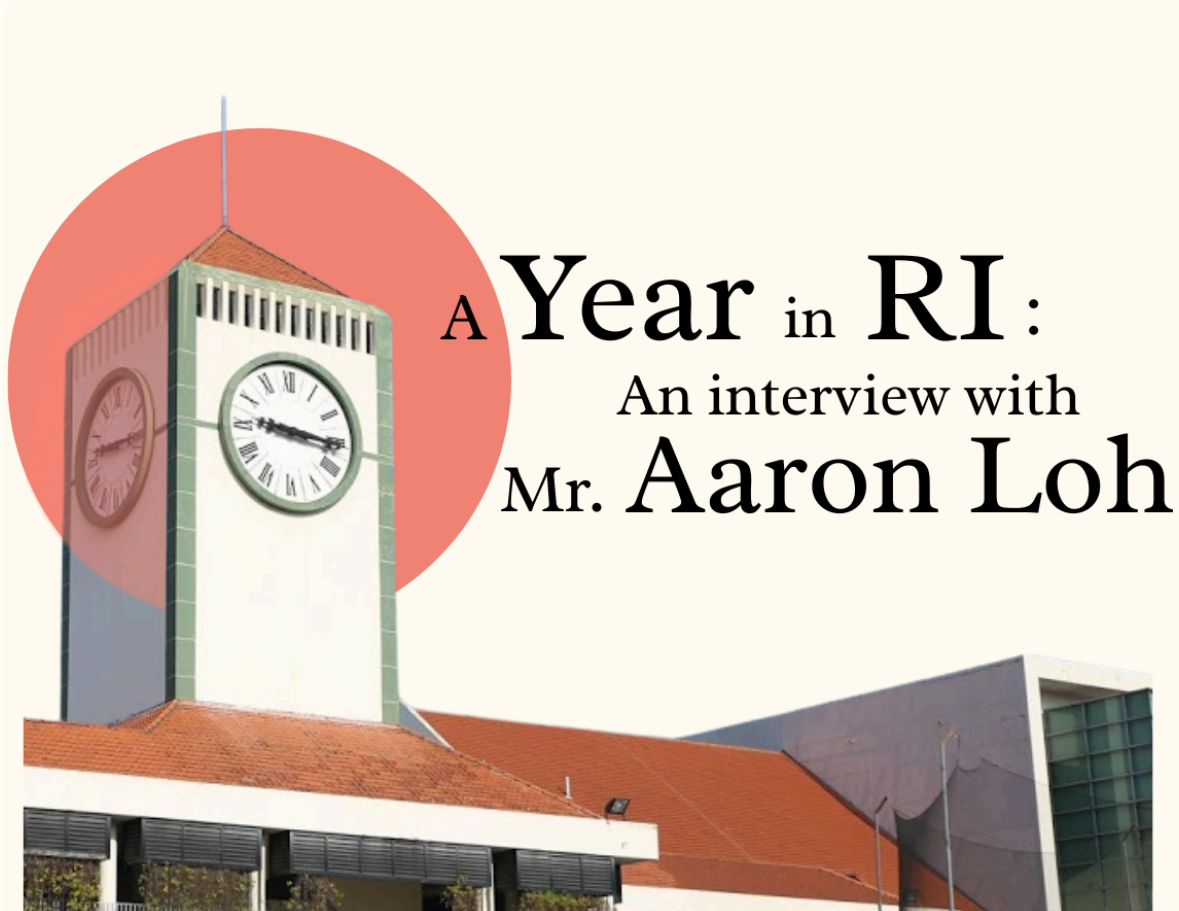
School keeps all of us busy, so we learn to move quickly, to think even faster, and to waste little time. Sometimes, the rush can make us blind to all the things happening on our campus, even when it's going on right around us. Not all changes announce themselves with noise, and some school matters don't register at all, escaping our notice entirely.

This year's special edition theme, **School Matters**, serves as a reminder of the giant ecosystem that is our school community! Our writers explore several school matters — offering critique, providing updates, and featuring *exclusive interviews* with school leaders and staff including our principal Mr Aaron Loh, our deputy principals, and Assistant Department Head of Student Management, Mr Tan Mian Ou.

In the process of writing these pieces, our writers have spoken to students, teachers, and school administrators alike. What follows is not only a more balanced look at what's happening behind the scenes but also a reminder of the many voices shaping our shared school experience.

Hopefully, while you're reading these stories, you'll discover something new about the school we spend so much of our time in!

Teo Hui Sian
Raffles Press Chairperson '25



A Year in RI: An interview with Mr. Aaron Loh

01

By Dawin Ng (25A01D), Pei Zhi Ning (25A01B), Sophie Chong (25A01A)

Special thanks to Li Houzhe (25A01A) and Isaac Chan (25A01B) for the photographs.

This interview with Mr Aaron Loh had originally started off with no clear direction. There was an understanding that we were going to do it, but for what purpose, no one knew. “School issues” sounded vague. “Getting to know” felt uninspired.

Not that there wasn’t anything to talk about. Since his appointment as principal on 15 December 2023 — almost one and a half years ago — the school had experienced a wave of changes as intense and as sweeping as the metamorphosis of a butterfly. Toilets were fixed up. Double CCAs were removed. A big podium had been constructed at the front of the parade square; and the area between Block A and B was fenced up and cordoned off with blue-and-white construction tarpaulin.

But where things got foggy was the driving force behind these developments. Even if they did not intend for it, the top body of the school executive has always appeared to be a triumvirate: The principal was always seen walking around with the deputy principals, and vice versa.

Add on the board of governors whose contributions were more felt than apparent, and you got the impression that these changes were only a series of corporate actions meant to “enhance the RI experience”, rather than the personal ideology of an individual.

To many students, Mr Loh was just there, it seemed, a figurehead of authority who popped up once in a while to give a speech, or to shake hands with a couple of students. If you passed him along the corridor, then he was a person you bowed to — because he was your principal and that was what you did when you meet your principal.



This sense of distance between student and principal didn’t go unnoticed by Mr Loh. After all, that was the very first thing he touched on in a previous [interview](#) with Raffles Press regarding the finished construction of the morning assembly platform. He remarked about how strange it felt standing at the old Wishing Well — “far away from the students” — and how he had had the idea for the platform since the very first day of his tenure.

It was only fitting, then, that Mr Loh’s most conscious attempt to reach out to the students came from an address conducted on said platform, on the very first morning assembly of 2025 — “If you have any feedback or issues you want to raise, just email me directly,” he encouraged. “I’ll try to address them, as much as the situation allows it.”

And seated in a conference room on the third floor of the administrative block now, face to face with Mr Loh, this desire to connect with his students only becomes more apparent. Actually, not just the students – but the entire school, in fact.

“For me, personally, I like to have connections with people,” he shares. “But being principal of RI makes it a little more difficult. You can’t treat RI and RJC as two schools, but it’s also not one school, exactly... The number of staff and students is very big.”

Yet, despite this mounting challenge to connect with a vast group of individuals, it hasn’t taken away from Mr Loh’s motivations as a principal – which can, perhaps, be attributed to two things: his role as a father and that of a Rafflesian.

Being a father of four, his experience as a parent inevitably diffuses into his work as a principal. With his children ranging from ages 14 to 18 – interestingly spanning the age range of RI students – his experience with them allows him to recognise the difficulties students in RI similarly face and how he can best interact with them, both in Years 1- 4 and on the JC side.

“I very much enjoy being a dad to my kids, and it’s something that I bring to my role as a principal.”

In many ways, his goals as a principal also mirror his motivations as a parent, “The desire to want to provide a good environment for them, to make them healthy and happy, and to address anything that is upsetting them, or anything that they find is an impediment to what they want to do – it’s all very similar to being a dad.” As he recalled his conversations with the students, Mr Loh laughingly remarked, “Sometimes when I speak to students, it’s just like talking to my kids.”

Naturally, he recognises that “parenting” 2400 additional students is a far greater challenge than being a dad to four, but Mr Loh continues to see the value of building personal connections with as many students as he can. To facilitate this, Mr Loh began regular engagements with students, speaking with a class per level across the Y1-6 student body. While this only represents a small fraction of the population, he sees this as a first step towards making a positive impact on the 2400 students he ‘parents’.



Yet, this desire is amplified by his unique understanding of the expectations placed on the school, not in terms of success, but in terms of spirit. Graduating from the RJC Class of 1994, his experience in school is in many ways enriched with an element of joy and pride of being a Raffles alumnus – the thrill of watching the Rugby Finals was more than just his delight for the students, but his pride at the continued legacy of sportsmanship and hard work of Rafflesians.

Therefore, he recognises the importance of preserving the centuries of heritage and identity behind the school name. Indeed, his personal experience in RI brings a crucial perspective to his decision-making as principal, which he describes as “a kind of intuition” for him.

“That idea of fulfilment, fruitfulness and peace has to be expressed in a particular way in this school, it has to be the Rafflesian flavour of health and fulfilment.”

At the same time, as the world develops, Mr Loh understands that the essence of a “Rafflesian identity” should not always be tied to a slew of old customs but follow the positive development of students. By working with the long-serving staff and Raffles alumni teaching in the school, many of whom are coincidentally Mr Loh’s ex-teachers and schoolmates, he hopes for constant innovation to improve student experience. Hence, rather than being bogged down by traditions, he believes in moulding the Rafflesian identity around agility and adaptability.



An obvious example of this flexibility would be the notable absence of any statistics during the [A-Level Results Release](#) this year, both in RI and in any other JC in Singapore. Getting the principals of the other schools on board was, according to Mr Loh – who chuckled as he answered – easy, with absolutely no need to persuade any of the other school leaders.

“(There was) the shared understanding that this was better for our students, to send this signal of what’s important.”

And what was important? Instead of the usual green-black-white numbers, percentages and pie charts of distinction rates and full UAS scores, Mr Loh’s speech was filled instead with promises of support, assurances of good performance, and a reminder for the graduating Y7s to “have a heart of gratitude – for the people who have helped you.” Certainly, it stands to symbolise the new shift away from grades as the sole defining factor, focusing rather on the holistic education that Mr Loh wishes to provide every student.

Mr Loh explained that this RI-initiated change was implemented in order to benefit the students, a manifestation of the expectation, he feels, for RI “to break new ground and pioneer new things”, in order to keep adapting, adjusting and altering our education to prepare RI’s students for the rapidly changing future.

Now, most of us should be aware of RI’s changed motto – no longer are we **Thinkers**, Leaders and Pioneers. Rather, we are now **Learners**, Leaders and Pioneers. Mr Loh explained that this was entirely deliberate, to embody the qualities that the school wishes to inculcate in the students.



By changing our key motto to “Learners”, he added that the school hopes that we “continue to be curious and have a learning perspective”, long after graduation. In learning, we develop a humble perspective, where no one and nothing is below learning from. That is what RI ultimately hopes for its students to leave its corridors holding.

Mr Loh's first year in RI has been truly eventful. Many changes have been made, with mixed responses from the student body. But, more than anything, we hope that this article has provided insight into the intentions, reasons and influences behind these changes, and a glimpse into the hopes of our new principal.



The Weight we wear: where our Uniform Regulations fall short

02

By Isaac Tay (25S06L) and Yvonne Cheung (25S03S)

Morning assembly is a test of endurance. Students rush up from the parade square, desperate to make it to their classes by 7:58am. The morning sun, the clawing heat and humidity of 2400 students crammed into the parade square, combined with the run from Marymount MRT station—it all conspires to make the expectations of looking smart and tidy even more difficult to meet. By the end of the Principal’s address, a sea of translucent dress shirts have bloomed, students slick with sweat, fabric clinging like cling-wrap to their backs and shoulder blades.

But beyond the discomfort of the sweltering heat and humidity, the school’s uniform regulations have become one of the most contested issues among students this year. The debate is not just about the heat, but also about identity, practicality and the unspoken culture

that uniforms aim to uphold. So, why are uniforms such a hot-button issue? We asked, you answered. Here's the honest feedback from students on what needs to change.

The Students' Plea for Half-Uni

Since the start of the year, the weather has undeniably been relentless. Scorching heat one moment, torrential downpours the next, with no relief in sight. With mood swings more intense than a teen in puberty, the weather has not shown our tiny island any mercy. And neither has it to our students. Our starched dress shirts are often described as 'stuffy', the white fabric soaking up the heavy weight of our sweat on hot days. And let's be honest, some of our peers generate enough sweat to power a hydropower plant.

Last year, when temperatures soared to unbearable levels, the school allowed half-uniforms. A temporary mercy that made the sweltering days slightly more bearable. Now, with conditions just as extreme on the worst days, students are seeking the same reprieve.

We have yet to even mention the practicality of the constant changing, whether it is for PE, or for CCA. The inconvenience of changing has been heavily feedbacked upon by students.

Picture this: It's Tuesday. No morning assembly, but you still drag yourself to school in that stiff white uniform shirt. First period passes, then comes the dreaded AM PE stampede. An entire level crams into the one bathroom of every floor, wrestling with buttons and toilet stalls. The changing and queuing take so long that half the class shows up 10-15 minutes late (20 if PE is at the stadium). After 50 minutes of sweating under the blazing sun, you're forced to squeeze back into your clingy uniform—if you are lucky, you *might* have break time to do it.

And if you're an athlete with CCA that day? Congrats, you get to change a third time.

Sure it sounds like minor gripes, but between the constant outfit swaps, the rushing between lessons, and the sheer weight of hauling around extra clothes – along with your equipment and school materials – it's hard not to wonder: What is even the point of full uniform on days like this? Is there a more practical solution? A little flexibility and understanding would go a long way in making these packed schedules feel less arduous. Even simple ideas and changes, such as allowing students to come to school in PE attire and change out after PE lessons, can help eliminate some of the inconvenience.

The Neglected Middle Child of the Uni-family

The school management wants to reinstate the discipline *apparel*-ntly lost over recent years, while the student body tries to cling desperately on to the comfort it has become too familiar with. In the midst of this struggle, a strikingly obvious yet painfully neglected solution hangs there in our closets.

It is unlike its older sibling, who is all about decorum, pride and who even flaunts a badge to show who's boss. Yet it also distincts itself from its playful, polychromatic younger sibling

who's all about fun and good vibes and reminding everyone of home. Instead, it embodies the best of both by serving as smart casual attire, yet being versatile enough to be a wearable option for sports activities.

Alas, this middle sibling seems to have been overshadowed by its brethren. The oldest child gets plenty of attention on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, and the youngest child gets some fun on Fridays, but it seems our dear middle child will only be given attention on PE periods or the occasional Gap day on Wednesday. But this does not have to be so.

Let's bring back the polo tees.

Apart from our prata stall and the recently renovated restrooms, the Raffles Polo Tee is arguably the best thing we have going for ourselves. It can be used to receive guests of honour in the school, and then to immediately play a game of basketball with friends right after. It is official school attire, unlike the super casual Orientation shirts, CCA-issued shirts or Gryphon Challenger jerseys.

Initially, we proposed the idea of giving the freedom to wear Polo Tees on Friday, alongside House Tees. But feedback builds upon ideas and makes them even better. In writing this article, we engaged the school for their perspective, and Mr Tan Mian Ou, Assistant Department Head of Student Management, graciously responded to our call. He encouraged us to reflect on the rationale of our suggestions and gave us many insights that added depth to the issues we brought up. Here's an updated proposal on Polo Tee days based on his additional insights:

Given that Tuesdays are non-assembly days, there is less need for formalities and thus it makes sense to designate them as Polo Tee days. If Polo Tee days ever become a thing, it will also be easier for students to remember what to wear on each day: assembly days are uniform days. (I know, Fridays are also assembly days, but do you think anyone would ever forget to wear House Tees as compared to “forgetting” to wear uniforms?)

Spacing out the uniform-wearing days will also give more breathing space in between. This is guaranteed to make students feel less discontented about having to wear uniforms. Finally, getting to wear Polo Tees and not having assembly on Tuesday, would boost Tuesday as a “chill vibe” day. Relaxed students are happy students, and happy students are productive students.

The Way Forward

Most students recognise and respect the purpose of school uniforms — fostering equality, discipline and a singular school identity. Wearing our school uniform properly and proudly is no doubt a responsibility every Rafflesian should uphold, and a practice that can prepare us for environments in the real world where dress codes matter and professionalism is valued.

Uniforms are a visual symbol and representation of the institution and the community we belong to.

“Come school must wear uniform, if not, why are we in school? ... For formality, it’s important,”

as quoted from an Anonymous student.

It’s clear that Rafflesians have the caliber to understand reason. All students want is a little bit of flexibility, empathy, and perhaps more discussion with our school administration. Through dialogues, there can be better transparency and greater exchange of ideas that allow understanding, acceptance, and change for the better. Remember that clarity does not dilute discipline. Rather, it transforms obligation into genuine understanding and ownership of the rules.

No one is expecting a giant upheaval of our uniform policy, bending to every whim and complaint of each student. But there are little things that can be changed, conversations to be had, and a middle ground to be found.

To the school’s credit, it has shown that it is indeed receptive to feedback. A recent example is the modification of the girls’ house shirts — previously, many female students found the sleeves to be disproportionately long and would resort to rolling them up. In response, the school adjusted the design to be more proportionate. This change may seem small, but it reflects a larger willingness to listen and adapt, suggesting that student voices can still shape how policies evolve.

Good dialogues are a two-way street — and we thank Mr Tan again for his valuable contribution of feedback. His response serves as a reminder that open, respectful dialogue is possible as well as meaningful, and that seeking to understand both sides often leads to more change than letting discontent quietly build. Perhaps the next step is for more students to voice their concerns directly and constructively, not just to be heard, but to truly be part of the conversation.

Acknowledging that the school is willing to listen does not invalidate student frustrations, instead, it strengthens the need for thoughtful feedback. At the end of the day, good policies consider the people they impact. Ask any student and they will most likely have something to say about our uniform regulations. They will show you the accumulated shirts folded in their closet forgotten and unused, the clock they watch while changing, and the extra weight in their bag.

The uniform stays pristine in the student handbook. But we wear the weight of reality.



Is One Enough?

The Single-CCA System

03

By Isaac Chan (25A07B), Valerie Ng (25S06N)

In 2025, beginning with the Batch of 2026, it was announced that Y56 Rafflesians would no longer be allowed to take on two Co-Curricular Activities (CCAs). The only dual-CCA combinations allowed would be Council and a non-schedule-conflicting CCA.

This is a marked change from the Batch of 2025's and prior batches' experience: while most would stick to one CCA, many Clubs and Societies saw their members taking on another CCA, often a higher-commitment one.

Why The Change?

It comes as no surprise that the academic workload students face is demanding, and

sometimes borders on insurmountable. Having to juggle this (heavy) workload, along with the numerous other commitments such as CCA, social life, and responsibilities outside of school, is clearly no mean feat.

The previous dual-CCA system only exacerbated this issue, as evidenced by the increasing trend of students being spread too thin among all their responsibilities (that can feel like mere obligations due to the sheer workload). By restricting the number of CCAs students can take up to just one, the school administration hopes that students will be able to better manage their commitments, both in and out of school, as well as have more free time to spend with their families and friends.

“The school also hopes that students will now be able to pursue their single CCA at a deeper level and reap more gains from that CCA, rather than spread themselves too thin in the pursuit of breadth”, reasons Mr Carlsen Tay (ADH, CCA), and instead, receive shallow exposure and commitment that benefits no one – not themselves, and not the CCA as a whole.

Perhaps another reason (that is not as immediately obvious to the student body as the first) for this switch to the single-CCA policy is the strain the previous dual-CCA system exacted upon the school’s resources. With RI’s astounding number of some 70 CCAs (before the shutdown of some of them), there must, of course, be someone behind the scenes running the show. This means having enough teachers to be present during CCA sessions, having enough venues to support the needs of each and every CCA, and more. Over time, the school administration found that having all these CCAs remain would simply not be sustainable – this further served as a catalyst for the switch to the single-CCA policy.

How CCAs got Hit

With some CCAs in RI, especially Clubs and Societies, being historically popular second CCA choices, the single-CCA policy has hit some CCAs and their membership numbers this year. Indian Cultural Club (ICS) is one of such CCAs – most members typically are also involved in another CCA alongside ICS. With the new policy, ICS’s membership count dropped to four, which poses challenges for their CCA events and activities. Chairperson Shresta Suresh (25So6F) shares that events are forced to be lower-scale because of their manpower shortages.

Shresta is herself in two CCAs whilst being Chairperson of ICS: she is also in Raffles Interact. Asked about her experience, she explains, “Since I am in two clubs, it is very manageable and I’ve never had the problem of coping with my CCAs or not having time to catch up with my schoolwork.”

She does see the merit of the policy though, agreeing that it does let students focus on exploring one particular interest. However, for clubs like ICS, where the scope might be less intense, the opportunity to explore multiple interests while remaining manageable is unfortunately lost.

What Y6s Say

Betty Ding (25Ao1B), who is in Raffles Crew and who is also the Vice-Chairperson (Training) of Raffles Press, has found her experience with these two CCAs largely enjoyable. “AVU (now

Crew) is pretty low commitment, we don't have regular sessions," she explains. "I don't find it that time-consuming. It's pretty fun, especially when these two CCAs can help each other. I've integrated some of my AVU knowledge into my articles too," she quips.

Asked about her thoughts on the new one-CCA system, Betty says, "It's kind of sad in the sense that... there are so many opportunities for CCAs to collaborate." While collaboration is harder with the decrease in intersections of members between CCAs, she also mentions how one CCA is the norm in primary and secondary school, and that it might only feel strange because RI's practice of allowing multiple CCAs was unorthodox in the first place.

Indeed, as writers both with CCAs that are, in some sense, higher commitment alongside Press, we echo Betty's sentiment. The dual-CCA system allowed us to learn sometimes completely disparate skills and delve into our diverse interests despite our busy schedules — in some sense, it is a pity that the possibility of taking two has been removed. The interplay of skills between our CCAs, for example, being able to interview your own teammates for an article covering the other CCA's competition for Raffles Press, is also a key learning point that will unfortunately be forgone.

Yet, the rationale does make sense: while most opt for one higher-commitment and one lower-commitment CCA, being in two and not fully knowing the commitment levels of CCAs before joining can come with tradeoffs and tolls on academic workload and mental health.

So, what now?

There is, indeed, some unfortunate loss in terms of the kind of interdisciplinary learning possible with two CCAs previously. However, that's not to say that one CCA is a detriment to the CCA experience: focusing on one CCA allows members to deepen their understanding of that CCA and hone their craft while not being forced to treat one CCA as peripheral during crunch periods. It also lets CCAs, particularly Clubs and Societies that are usually picked as second CCAs, to develop their members more and push them further in the respective fields with less worry about stressing their members out too much because of having to juggle two CCAs.

As the school settles into this new norm, we can perhaps look forward with cautious optimism to both CCAs and students developing their co-curricular skills more deeply and dedicatedly in the years ahead.



Meeting Up with the Merged CCAs

04

By Betty Ding (2SA01B) and Meryl Lim (2SS05A)

In 2024, RI underwent a significant reshaping of its CCA landscape, with several CCAs merged and a few others discontinued. For the merged CCAs, you can say it was like a surprise arranged marriage of sorts—arranged, officiated, and enforced by the school with no clear path to a divorce or annulment.

And like any couple, each pair of merged CCAs will have to find their own way to resolve their differences and get used to their new normal. We sat down with members from Chamber Ensemble, Raffles Image Art Collective (RIAC) and Raffles Crew to find out more about what this looks like, and the stories that unfolded behind the scenes.

Chamber Ensemble



This merger came as no surprise to both Piano and Chamber Ensemble. Simply put, it was:

“Business as usual.”

- Nicholas Kim (25So6A), Chairperson of Piano Ensemble '25

Having collaborated for [Concert Reverie](#) in 2024, the pair already had experience working with each other. Hence, when it came to the possibility of a merger, both Piano and Chamber Ensemble welcomed it with open arms—after the initial shock had worn off.

We met with the chairpersons of Piano Ensemble '25 and Chamber Ensemble '25— Nicholas Kim (25So6A) and Tan Tze Rui (25So3I) respectively—to find out more.

With greater numbers and even a Year 5 who plays both cello and piano, the merger felt less like a messy collision of two worlds and more like natural harmony. After all, chamber music has always included piano, not just strings and bows. In that sense, Piano Ensemble was never a stranger to Chamber, but rather just waiting for its cue to come in.



Chamber Ensemble's first combined concert, Interlude

Still, according to Nicholas and Tze Rui, the road ahead seems uncertain for the future generations of Chamber EXCO. Having to juggle SYF one year and a joint concert the next is no easy feat, especially since it has never been done before. However, they're hopeful that for non-SYF years, they'll have more flexibility in their collaborations.

Along with the spate of CCA mergers, there were a few new policies implemented that invariably affected CCA membership for the new batch such as the one CCA policy and the shift of Student Council meeting timings from Wednesday afternoons to Wednesday mornings. Nicholas explained how the merger benefitted Chamber:

"I was quite happy, because I suspected that we would have issues with [membership] numbers. But we didn't know the

policies yet. Now that we know the policies, in hindsight, it was a very good move.”

For Chamber, their merger could be described as smooth as a well-rehearsed legato—the nature of both CCAs, session timings and usual routines have remained essentially the same. Sure, there were new faces to get used to, but it was nothing a few more meetings and bonding sessions couldn’t solve.

If you think about it, it could be argued that the most ideal merger is one that barely feels like one.

However, for Raffles Image Arts Collective (RIAC) and Raffles Crew, the merged CCAs seem to have more differences to reconcile than similarities.

Raffles Image Art Collective (RIAC)



No, before you ask, it’s not *Raffles Institution Art Club*. Acronyms aside, we sat down with the chairpersons of Photographic Society ‘25 and Art Club ‘25, namely Ryan Poh (25So6F) and Zhong Jinxuan (25So6R) to learn more about the merger.

The RIAC merger was justified by logistical issues that were out of their control, and also could be seen as an attempt to emulate how things are run at the Y14 side, where Photographic Society (known more commonly as Photog) and Art have already been merged (you may know

them as RPAC). Since both CCAs work with visual media, the merger seemed logical on the surface.

Despite this, it was apparent that the merger came as a huge shock to both Photog and Art Club. It left many scratching their heads, wondering: why these two CCAs?

Photog can be considered a Service CCA—as seen from their role in capturing official CCA pictures for the school’s yearbook and efforts in covering almost every school event—whereas Art Club is more focused on self-expression and creativity.

To understand how this newly merged CCA worked, we interviewed Kai Xin (26A01C), a Y5 who shared her experience as a member of the first batch of RIAC.

Though initially unsure about joining RIAC due to the merger, her interest in photography eventually pushed her to become a member. Since then, the CCA has widened her perspective on photography. Beyond just taking photographs, she thinks that she could incorporate artistic aspects into her pictures to enhance them, and digital design to “make cooler shots”.

Looking ahead, she hopes to be able to work with her batch to make a mini-magazine that integrates Photog’s “Deck the Walls” initiative (see: the CCA pictures hung up around school!) with Art elements via graphic design.



RIAC Batch '26 picture

From her experience, it can be seen that the merger appears to bring together elements of photography and design to give rise to a completely revamped CCA experience, one that leans more towards photography and digital design specifically.

It's different, and *that* just might be the problem.

In the process of creating something new, something else is bound to get lost in the mix. In this case, it's the "Art" in "Raffles Image Art Collective".

Jinxuan explains to us that RIAC is "incorporating more artist attitudes into their photography" so it feels like "they took the specialty of artistic photography and refined it into a CCA." Today, if someone wished to do "traditional" art in RI, the closest and only way to do what Art Club used to do, such as painting and sketching, would be to take H2 Art.

While it might not sound like much has been lost, let us paint you a picture: the H2 Art cohort usually has fewer than 10 students every year. Those who take H1 Art don't get the same luxury of hands-on activity as the syllabus only consists of written papers.

The loss of Art Club completely shuts off any avenues for students to pursue art as a casual hobby or develop their passions, and as aptly summed up by Jinxuan:

"There just isn't really a way for people to actually do traditional art in the school anymore."

Even though Ryan and Jinxuan expressed understanding towards why the merger happened, you can't help but feel that the omission of traditional art as a CCA is somewhat disappointing—in fact, that would be a huge understatement.

It's a pity, but change is change, and it's heartening to see the Chairs take it in their stride.

When asked how they feel about being the founders of RIAC, Ryan suggested an alternative: he instead views his batch as the "sun-setting members of the closing down CCA".

"As we start to hand over the reins, in my case, to them, it's really about trying to make sure that we can salvage what's left of photography and making sure that the new batch also gets the freedom to chart their own vision."

Truly, this merger signals a new dawn for RIAC. Whatever the future holds, Ryan hopes that the juniors can "make a good legacy for what's to come".

But more importantly, both Ryan and Jinxuan hope that the new batch doesn't forget that RIAC is made up of two halves: Photography and Art Club. As Jinxuan puts it best:

“Like Jurong Pioneer, Yishun Innova – when you see the name, you think ‘Alright, they used to be separate, and now they’re together.’”

The beauty of sunsets is that no two are ever the same, each one a fleeting masterpiece brushed across the sky. The Batch of '25 might have reached for their brushes, easels, and cameras to capture its glow. But now it is up to the Batch of '26 to chase the light and create a sunset that is entirely their own.

Raffles Crew



Disclaimer: Both writers are from [Raffles Crew](#).

To gain more insight regarding the merger of Raffles Crew, we sat down with Mr Tay Li Cheng and Mrs Dawn Wu, the teachers-in-charge of Film Society, and the EXCO of AVU (Audio Visual Unit) and Film Society (or FilmSoc) who shared with us the Good, the Bad and the Ugly.

It started all the way back in July 2024—long before the rumours of CCA mergers began floating around school.

Mr Tay and Mrs Wu shared that the process began as a consultative one with the school, involving discussions about the potential scope of the new CCA and manpower challenges. While many factors had to be taken into account, Mr Tay emphasised that the student experience ultimately remained the key consideration.

To no one's surprise, members' reactions to the merger were also of [shock and confusion](#). Now caught in a peculiar situation, the EXCO had to navigate integrating the two seemingly incompatible CCAs. According to them, the initial experience was akin to the “five stages of grief.”

Merger was never expected to be on the table for AVU, and as for FilmSoc, there were significant concerns initially of being “phased out” and “diluted” in the newly merged CCA.



Audio Visual Unit Batch of '25



Raffles Film Society Batch of '25

The AVU and FilmSoc EXCOs came together for numerous meetings over the Nov-Dec holidays, trying to piece together a hopefully coherent and cohesive new CCA.

With two completely different CCAs, there were bound to be different perspectives. Moreover, even as the general direction of the newly merged CCAs was decided, many details could only be ironed out and decided after the first batch joined Raffles Crew.

Raffles Crew’s new direction can be explained in three words:

“Transformation, not addition”

- Mrs Wu, teacher-in-charge of Raffles Crew

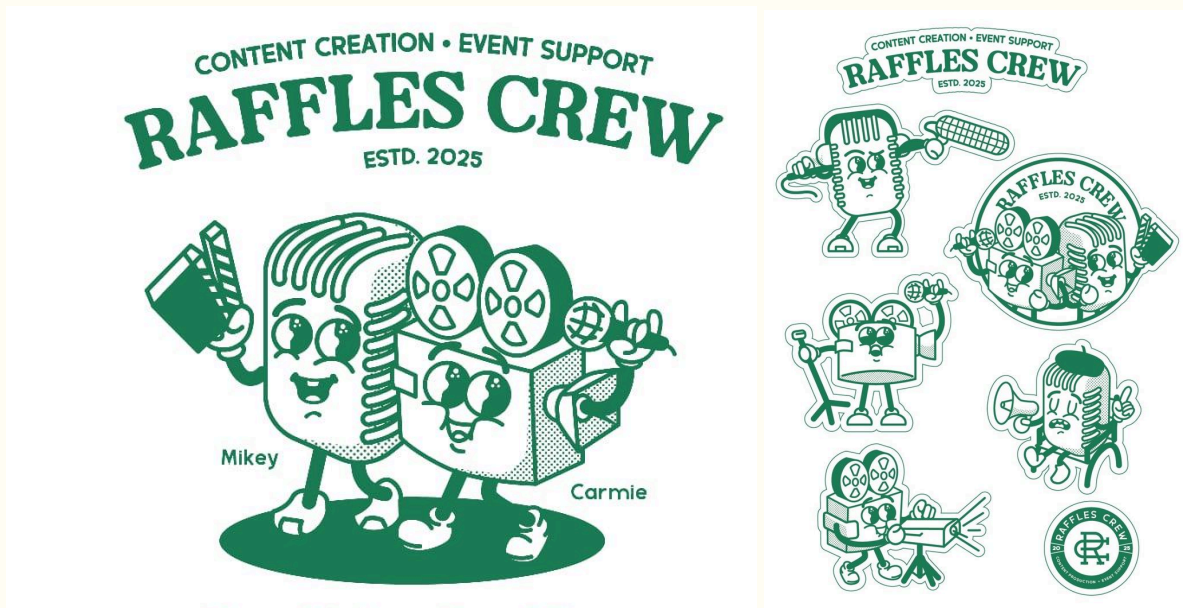
Raffles Crew was never meant to take on a “track” system, where members get to choose to specialise in either Film or AVU. Instead, members will get to experience both Film and AVU, creating a truly unique CCA experience (a rare chance to get two CCAs for the price of one—especially with the newly adopted one-CCA rule!)



Film Soc and AVU at work

However, as much as it creates an interesting and unique experience, it might also be a turn-off to potential members who would only be interested in one aspect of the CCA.

“[It was an] almost schizophrenic experience marketing it” was how Mr Tay described one of Raffles Crew’s major obstacles—Open House ‘25. With the curriculum for the new batch still being in the works, it was hard to say what the new members could expect if they joined the CCA.



Raffles Crew mascots designed by Mr Tay!

Manpower issues also manifested themselves in terms of CCA recruitment, bringing the final member count of the pioneer batch of Raffles Crew turned out to be 11—a significant decrease compared to the previous combined Film Society and AVU batch total of 29.

In other words, future batches will have to juggle the demands of school event support and filmmaking.

Here’s what it looks like behind the scenes: Each ArtSeason, Raffles Crew will have to take on more than 10 different events along with their many respective rehearsals—a workload that might spell an end to a beloved Film Society tradition: an annual Y6 thesis film showcase, where the graduating batch presents their films to the school in the PAC.



The pioneer batch of Raffles Crew – Raffles Crew '26

Hearing about the CCA mergers is one thing, but being part of one is another. In retrospect, change was inevitable for AVU—it would have happened in one form or another, sooner or later. As an ad-hoc CCA and based on the way we were structured, it was only a matter of time before we had to evolve to adapt to the changing demands of time.

And in terms of mergers, we're glad we ended up with Film Society—the teachers and members have been nothing but supportive, and it's been such a unique journey watching our shared vision of Raffles Crew come to life. The challenges faced made the experience all the more rewarding, and seeing how the next batches carry forward and reshape the legacy of Raffles Crew based on what we've built has only made us more excited for what's to come.

As Mr Tay beautifully put it:

“Change is the only constant - except from a vending machine.”

Whilst change can get messy, he remains excited that the new batches get to create or define *their* “Raffles Crew”, and the focus of Raffles Crew can be redefined according to each batch.

As for Jonell Leong (25S03O), the Chairperson of Film Society '25, she hopes that Raffles Crew will remain a space that's dedicated to honing and pursuing members' interest in Film, while continuing the legacy of both AVU and FilmSoc. Similarly, William Tan (25S03Q), the

Vice-Chairperson of FilmSoc '25, believes that for Raffles Crew to progress, the new batch will have to “make Raffles Crew their own CCA”.

While the merger didn't make complete sense at first, it's starting to—kind of. Like the pilot season of a show, it's full of unexpected choices, interesting coincidences (like how both original CCA jackets already had 'Crew' on the back), and a cast still finding its rhythm. But that's what makes it exciting: they're the OG cast of Raffles Crew, figuring it out as they go.

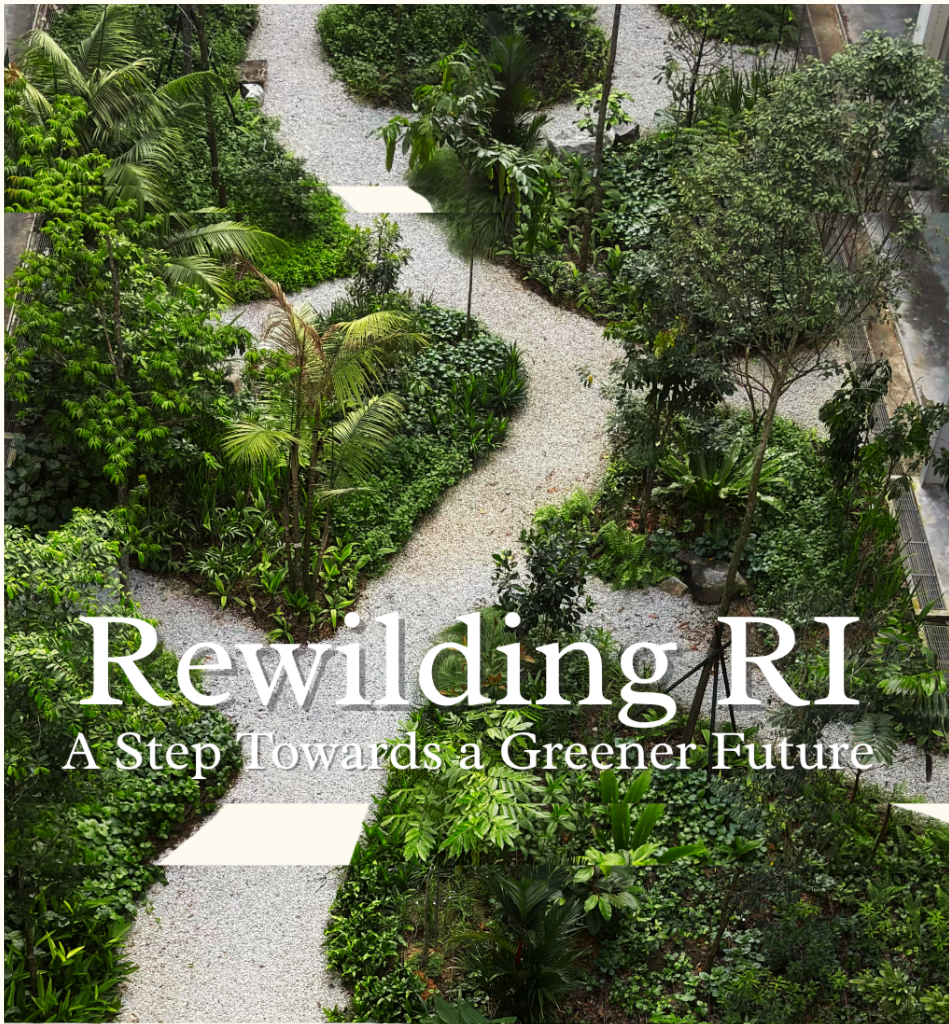
Conclusion

As they say: when one door closes, another opens.

It's too early to say what the newly merged CCAs will look like, and it's hard to say when or how they'll find their footing, but one thing's for sure: this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the future batches to chart their own path.

As the last batches of Piano Ensemble, Chamber Ensemble, Photographic Society, Art Club, Film Society, and Audio Visual Unit graduate, they leave behind a lasting legacy, having forged a new path for Chamber Ensemble, Raffles Image Art Collective (RIAC) and Raffles Crew.

In the long history of Raffles Institution, perhaps our time will only be remembered as 13 words in the RAM archive. Yet with the newly merged CCAs, a new story begins—one that the next generation will write, frame, and stage for themselves.



05

By Jane Ng (25503D) and Tay Yu Ning (25507A)

Let's address the elephant in the room. By now, you probably would've noticed the major overhaul of the garden between Block A and B. Heard whispers of a new "Rewilding" initiative. Read our Nest@RI article and believed it.

In this climate (both social and literal) of budding social awareness about the environment, we've seen it start to pop up everywhere. From VIA groups, new initiatives in other schools, to

even a CCA founded on the basis of environmental stewardship (One Earth), it was only a matter of time before RI management would follow suit.

“Rewilding” isn’t so much of an overhaul as it is an initiative to cement our role as a natural green corridor. Students here are no stranger to wildlife—we’ve coexisted with the numerous chickens, cats, fish and even otters on campus for years. And so, the more important objective of this initiative is to connect on-campus ecosystems with each other, and with the students.

“But it’s different because we are a school, right? And on top of the school itself trying to be sustainable, we are also trying to nurture that mindset in our students.”

- Mr Aaron Loh, Principal of RI

Ultimately, this initiative isn’t just for the flora and fauna—it’s for us, too. Beyond the school’s lofty goals of incorporating nature into our curriculum, building all these green spaces is, more simply, a means of mindfulness and relaxation. And hopefully, through closer contact with nature, students can foster a more organic relationship with the environment.

The Blueprint: Rewilding Plans Across the Campus

While the Immersion Forest was officially opened on the 22nd of April, there’s a myriad of other changes slated for the rest of the year and beyond.

The Rewilding initiatives are planned in phases, with Phase 1 to be completed by June 2025 and Phase 2 by the end of the year. For example, if you’ve noticed ongoing construction on your way to the Y1-4 canteen, next to the Y1-4 parade square, that’s set to become a cascading waterfall garden as part of Phase 1. Deeper into the Y1-4 campus, there will also be a marsh and a dragonfly pond, the latter of which, interestingly enough, was proposed to mitigate mosquito issues.



RI Y1-4 students can look forward to a dragonfly pond here in the near future!

Closer to home, there are also plans to build a stream near the P4 pickup point and perhaps more green spaces near Block D, though these may only materialise later as part of Phase 2 or beyond.

More importantly, students can look forward to hands-on activities and lessons being conducted in these spaces in the future.

“Our teachers are already thinking about how to incorporate some of these environments into the curriculum. So, it serves as a wonderful stimulus for learning biology, even physics, math, not to mention literature. It's a very, very rich, authentic learning environment to enhance the student experience.”

- Mr Aaron Loh, Principal of RI

From Concrete to Canopy: Before and After



Before



After

The transformation is already tangible. What used to be manicured, high-maintenance lawns are now wild, self-sustaining ecosystems. RI’s rewilded spaces are alive with creatures such as:

- Sunbirds
- Spiders, bugs, and other arthropods
- Otters (who visited as early as November 2024!)

The shift is not just visual—it’s ecological. Students now walk through living, breathing ecosystems on their way to class.

Behind the Scenes: Planning, Design & Collaboration

The Rewilding initiative at RI is the result of careful planning, thoughtful design, and close collaboration across multiple stakeholders. Inspiration was drawn from pioneering efforts at places like Commonwealth Secondary School—where Mr Aaron Loh previously served and witnessed the transformation of mature rainforest spaces—as well as the SG Enable Village, known for its integrated, nature-centric approach to urban design.



A glimpse of the SG Enabling Village’s natural landscapes

“It wasn’t just about aesthetics,” said Mr Aziz, Manager (Services and Operations) of the school’s Estate Department. “We made design decisions like swapping the pond and pavilion for better views, and even planned for long-term irrigation with auto top-ups in case of drought.”

All plants used are native to Singapore or Southeast Asia—no exotic species were introduced. Labels with QR codes that link to NParks pages are being developed, turning every tree into a learning opportunity.

A Message from Mr Aaron Loh (Video)



What Lies Ahead: Learning, Living, Leading

“This is just Phase One and Two. We’re already thinking about Phase Three and Four.”

– Mr Aziz

This is just the beginning of Rewilding @ RI. Our school’s Rewilding initiative is not only about importing greenery into the campus, but also about shaping the students and staff of the school to interact meaningfully with nature. Some future plans for meaningful interaction with nature include curriculum integration (where our natural spaces will be used for science, geography and even literature classes!) and cross-school collaboration projects.

As Singapore moves toward a greener future, RI is doing more than keeping pace—it’s setting the rhythm.

Reduced Focus on Grades:



06

By Choo Zi Xuan (25503E) and Shanice Foo (25503A)

Images courtesy of Raffles Image Arts Collective

Success in RI has long been equated with achieving straight A's. Now, it's about the stories you create, the challenges you embrace, and the communities you uplift. In alignment with this new version of success, the school is shifting its focus towards a more holistic school experience and placing more emphasis on other priorities, such as a more vibrant school life.

To understand more about the thinking behind these changes, we had a sit-down chat with the deputy principals of RI, Mr Brian Ang (DP, Academic Studies) and Ms Ng Mei Sze (DP, Student Development).

What inspired this change?

As many may have already noticed, the school has introduced a number of changes in recent months, aimed at enhancing students' academic experience and overall well-being. These

changes reflect a broader shift in the school's philosophy — one that recognises the importance of a healthier, more holistic definition of success.

Furthermore, the decision to implement these changes was not made in isolation, but rather in response to a growing national emphasis on student well-being. The “*kiasu*” culture (defined as the fear of losing out) has long been part and parcel of the average Singaporean's life, yet is increasingly recognised as a double-edged sword within the education system. While the drive to excel can fuel discipline and effort, it also brings with it an unnecessary amount of stress, anxiety, and the fear of not doing enough. This deeply ingrained mindset has often led students to define success by how well they perform relative to others, rather than in terms of their own personal discovery.

For one, the [combined decision to stop the release of each year's batch performance in the A levels](#), which sparked widespread discussion among students and the wider Singaporean community alike, was a conscious move to shift the focus away from benchmarking one's own performance against previous batches, or even comparing between JCs.

This change also challenges a common mindset among students: choosing a junior college based on its distinction rate. As Mr Ang pointed out, this kind of thinking treats education like a probability game: the assumption being that enrolling in a school with a 75% A-rate equates to a 75% chance of getting an A. “But success”, he emphasised, “is not about placing yourself in a high-performing environment and expecting results by default: it is about how you use the resources available to you, take ownership of your learning, and define goals that are meaningful and realistic within your personal context.”

Another key idea behind the shift is the concept of seasonality: the belief that students benefit from a rhythm to school life, one that allows for balance and recovery over the short two-year JC period. Much like how nature moves through the four seasons (albeit not felt in Singapore), the school year is being restructured to reflect periods of different focus: times of intense academic rigour, and times when other aspects of school life come to the fore.

This counters the old model of nonstop productivity — similar to an endless “summer” of work that, over time, wears students down. Instead, the school aims to foster a more sustainable pace: one that recognises there is a time for pushing forward academically, and a time for stepping back to engage in other non-academic activities, connect with friends, and take a much needed break.

*“But actually nature doesn't operate that way, does it?
There are four seasons. And so does the human body.
[...] there is actually a bigger picture of school life and
a student rhythm that we have.”*

— Ms Ng

So, what has changed?

One of the most visible shifts is in how the Y5 weighted assessment, which now accounts for 30% of the Y5 promotional grades, are structured. Rather than setting a weightage for every assignment, the system has been designed to prioritise each student's unique pace. Only the best two scores out of three or four assignments across the term are considered, providing the room to adapt to the heavier workload and manage their schedules accordingly. It also reflects the belief that learning is not about constant pressure, but about making meaningful progress over time.

The idea of seasonality extends further to the academic calendar, where each term is deliberately planned to allow for different commitments to take precedence. With the school's support, Term 2 is kept flexible (relative to Term 3) in terms of academic intensity to allow students to fully engage in CCA commitments, such as the National School Games, Singapore Youth Festival showcases, or even just showing up for their friends.

In the same vein, match support has been made compulsory for all Y5 classes. Though some may initially think of it as a disruption to lessons, it is a deliberate invitation for students to step away from the classroom to cheer on their schoolmates — to be part of moments treasured and experienced together, and which are just as integral to school life as academics. By fostering such experiences, RI makes a conscious move to help students to build their own community within the school.



Rafflesians cheering at match support

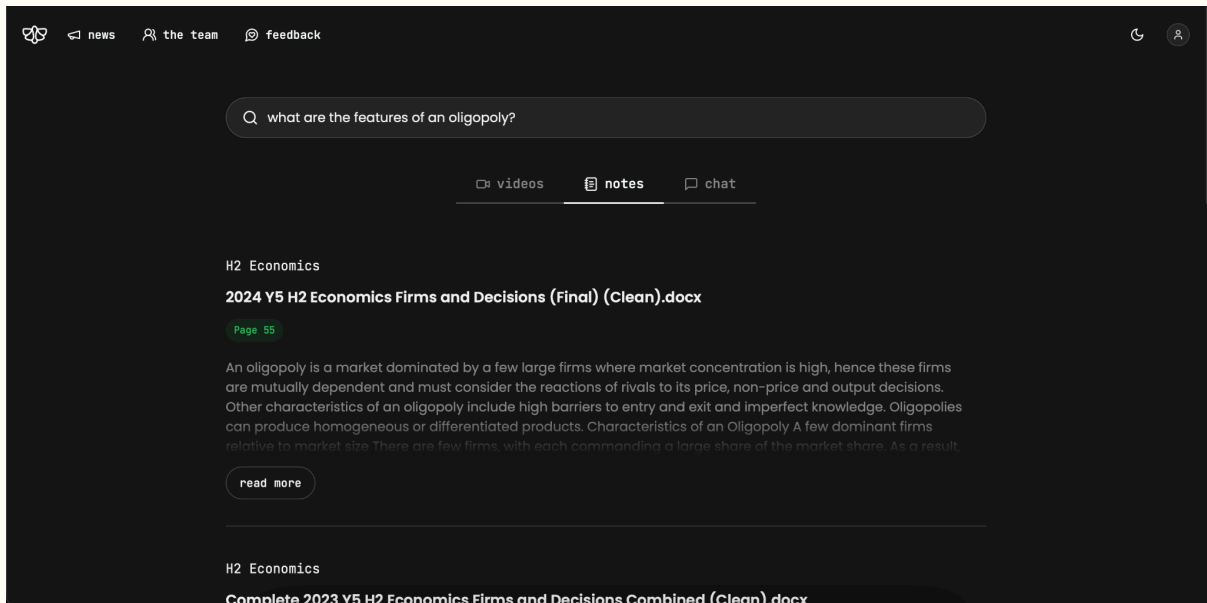
Furthermore, the inaugural Team Raffles procession was designed to be more inclusive and celebratory this year, with the entire school in participation. Unlike previous years when the event was limited to the Multipurpose Hall, with only student athletes involved, the procession was opened up to involve everyone across all CCAs, fostering a greater sense of school spirit and unity.



Team Raffles procession that took place on the 14th of March, 2025

In contrast, Term 3 marks a shift in focus toward academics. With CCA sessions toning down to just six of the 10 weeks, the term is structured to be a time of rigour where intensive revision and remedial lessons become priority. This ensures that students are given the time and space to dedicate their time fully to their academics without the pressure of other commitments.

In addition to structural changes, RI has been exploring other innovative approaches to support learning. [Raffles Revel](#), an AI smart search tool for Chemistry and Economics, was introduced as one of the resources available to aid students in their studies. A simple search links the relevant lectures and materials on Ivy, the school's platform for lesson materials, allowing students to quickly find the information needed at a glance.



A screenshot of Raffles Revel's smart search tool in action

In accordance with the school's philosophy that learning is a continuous, long-term process, this was designed not to replace student initiative but to empower it, offering a support structure while still encouraging students to take ownership of their learning. Providing such a tool can help shorten the time needed for students to catch up and deepen their understanding of the respective subjects independently, ensuring that they are responsible for their learning process.

“I need to teach you how to fish. I cannot be fishing for you.”

— Mr Ang

Finally, adjustments have also been made to the weekly timetable to extend cohort time to four blocks instead of the initial two, allocating a longer, dedicated slot that takes the form of civics lessons (within class) or batch assemblies. A recent change made within the last two to three years, this space was intentionally set aside for students to engage with issues beyond academics, reflect on their experiences, as well as bond with their class and the larger Rafflesian community.



Y6 Homerun assembly taking place during cohort time

The message is clear: while results still matter, they should not overshadow the rest of the journey. “If you miss these moments because your assessment doesn't allow you to, [...] the stress falls on [students] to have to choose. We're trying to make that not so onerous so you guys can enjoy these parts of school”, Ms Ng commented, echoing the sentiment that underscores many of the recent changes designed to ease that pressure. By making space for students to be more present in their day-to-day school life, RI hopes to cultivate not just high achievers but individuals who understand that a “successful” school experience is more than just a grade.

The End Goal

These changes are not isolated efforts but rather part of a broader vision of improving student well-being and reshaping the learning process.

Indeed, the school’s vision has changed from “Thinker, Leader, Pioneer” to “*Learner*, Leader, Pioneer”. The subtle switch in wording is meant to redirect the end goal of the academic program in RI to be one that values the learning process more.

“Thinking is a very internal thing. It's a very individual thing.”

– Ms Ng

As Ms Ng had pointed out, the traditional learning process was seen as a solitary task, with emphasis being placed on simply getting all the right answers. Moving past that, the school administration now aims to make the educational process more interactive. Beyond answer

keys and lectures, students are now encouraged to actively enquire to gain more knowledge, while reducing the general stigma against failure. Through the learning process, Rafflesians would gain essential soft skills that enable them to navigate future challenges more effectively.

“There is a whole journey of highs and lows, because learning is a process. You learn as a community, you interact with people, you ask questions, you hear, you absorb.”

– Ms Ng

On a more sentimental note, Ms Ng also notes that the two-year experience in JC, albeit short, comes by only once in a lifetime. We are in our last stretch of adolescence, right at the cusp of adulthood, with many doors being opened. It would be a shame for us to spend these precious moments focused solely on our “workload”. The school hopes that by allocating different seasons for different priorities, students would not have to resort to forgoing one for the other, and hence have more opportunities to create memories together.

“At that age of 17 to 18 years old, you only go through this phase once. Together, once. Don't waste that time.”

– Ms Ng

In truth, looking back on our JC experience many years later, we would be less likely to recall the many hours spent mulling over various subjects. It is the camaraderie, the community, the moments shaped with the people around us at this very moment that will shine the brightest in our memories.

credits

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