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Hillgrove Secondary School and NCC Air cadets (from left) Andrian Putera, Ruben Koh Zhi Fu and Vivas Marcus Andrei Daniel, all 15, flying a remote-controlled ranger 600 glider. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

TAKE FLIGHT WITH CCA

Co-curricular activities are integral to secondary school life and can teach important values



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When Arissa Kamaruzaman started Secondary 1, she heard the Coldplay song, Viva La Vida, played on the angklung.

Intrigued that the pop classic was being played on the traditional Indonesian instruments at the orientation event for co-curricular activities (CCAs), she signed up for the Angklung Ensemble.

"It sounded fresh and I liked how the instruments had such a unique melody. I wanted to be part of this CCA," says the 15-year-old Raffles Girls' School student.

"You get a very full experience. You get to be part of a community that evolves over four years," she says. "I was a shy Year 1. But when we prepared for competitions like SYF (Singapore Youth Festival), we managed to learn together and were united in our goals. The seniors gave us a lot of support and I came out of my shell eventually."

Now in Secondary 4, Arissa is the chairman of the executive committee of her school's Angklung Ensemble, where she plays the gendang, a two-headed Indonesian drum.

In RGS, older students can organise events and hold selection trials for CCAs like the Angklung



Dunman High School offers Beijing opera as a co-curricular activity, with group members sometimes in full costume (left, in a 2019 photo). PHOTO: DUNMAN HIGH SCHOOL

Ensemble, with guidance from their teachers.

With secondary schools offering a wide range of CCAs, including unusual options such as archery and Chinese opera, CCA life is different from that in primary school.

For example, CCAs are compulsory in secondary school, unlike in primary school.

Students are also strongly encouraged to stick to one CCA throughout secondary school. Rare exceptions where students request to change their CCA are granted on a case-by-case basis.

In contrast, primary school pupils are often allowed to switch and try out different CCAs.

Mr Eddie Tan, head of department (HOD) for physical education (PE) and CCA in Hillgrove Secondary School, says: "In primary school, the focus is to be

exposed to a range of CCAs and explore different interests.

"In secondary school, the focus is to have specialisation in the CCAs and to have exposure to different opportunities within the CCA."

An Education Ministry spokesman says: "The CCA programme is an integral component in the holistic education of our students."

The ministry representative says CCA is also a platform for leadership and character development; cultivating values and social-emotional competencies; as well as a foundation for life-long learning.

Ms Tng Ee Hwei, HOD of PE and CCA at Beatty Secondary School, adds: "CCAs bring students from diverse backgrounds and different academic streams together."

Perhaps reflecting the ministry's push towards a greater awareness of holistic education, some stu-

dents even take CCAs into account when applying for their secondary school after the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE).

Freya Swallow, 15, who is now in Secondary 4, chose to go to Beatty Secondary School because it offered canoeing as a CCA.

She qualified for entry into Beatty with her T-score for PSLE at the time – a different PSLE scoring system was introduced last year – while another school that offered canoeing as a CCA was too far from her home.

Freya, who used to do synchronised swimming when she was younger, "wanted to do something related to water sports."

She says: "CCAs are a big part of secondary school life. When it came to secondary school choices, the CCA played a big factor."

Compared with primary school,

the decision regarding which CCA to join is weightier.

Under the Education Ministry's Leaps 2.0 framework, bonus points relating to one's CCA can be used for post-secondary admission.

"At the end of their graduating year, students' co-curricular attainment will be recognised and translated to bonus points, which can be used for admission to junior colleges, polytechnics or Institutes of Technical Education," says the ministry spokesman.

Teens in secondary school often spend more time engaging in their CCAs – two or three times a week – which contributes to longer school days than primary school.

Secondary 1 students typically consider their choice of CCAs in January as they begin school.

CCA orientation is part of the general orientation programme for Secondary 1 students, who are invited to attend trials or auditions for many of the CCAs on offer.

The Secondary 1 students are generally asked to list several CCA choices in order of preference, and the school authorities allocate their first choice of CCA where possible.

This is not always possible due to a scarcity of resources and manpower.

In Maris Stella High School, for instance, archery is among the 19 CCAs offered, says HOD of CCA Koh Yew Kiat.

With targets set up in a tennis court converted for use, there is a quota of just 15 students for each secondary school level for the CCA.

Many CCAs in secondary schools, especially those relating to sports, are not for purely recreational purposes, says Mr Koh.

"These CCA participants train to represent their school," he adds.

CHANCE TO EXPLORE DIFFERENT INTERESTS continued on C2

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Co-curricular activities offered at Raffles Girls' School include the Handbells Ensemble (above left) and the Angklung Ensemble (above).
ST PHOTOS: DESMOND FOO

Chance to explore different interests

FROM C1

Teachers acknowledge that some parents express concerns that their children were unable to get into their preferred CCAs.

Mr Leong Hon Fai, HOD of PE and CCA at Compassvale Secondary School, says such disappointments can provide life lessons as not everything pans out as one wishes.

He says: "With so much that is new in Secondary 1, there is no need to be fixated on one area.

"Parents can lighten the mood if their child feels down. It's an opportunity for the child to try different sports or activities."

Besides, recreational opportunities exist in school outside of CCAs, says Mr Leong.

For example, his school's most popular CCA, badminton, is also part of the PE syllabus.

The Aeronautics Club and Robotics Club are second and third respectively in terms of popularity as CCAs at Compassvale Secondary.

Mr Leong says the Aeronautics Club "is a CCA complementing our aeronautics applied learning programme for all lower-secondary students, and students are attracted to its uniqueness and novelty".

The applied learning programme in schools helps students connect academic knowledge and skills with the real world.

Mr Leong says: "In this past decade, there has been a greater variety of CCAs in schools. The revision in CCA policies, such as greater autonomy for schools to

recognise students' CCA achievements, definitely opens up more options for students to pursue a CCA of their interest.

"There is also greater emphasis on talent development and students can apply for Direct CCA Admission based on their CCA."

Some CCAs may have names familiar to today's parents of secondary school students, but their subject matter has changed.

Hillgrove Secondary School, for instance, has a similar applied learning focus as Compassvale, where students are exposed to Stem (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) concepts through flight and aerospace.

Hillgrove has CCAs such as Air Scouts, Youth Flying Club and NCC (Air), where the acronym stands for National Cadet Corps.

While the culture of each is different, there are some common elements, such as learning to fly remote-controlled craft or drones.

Besides inculcating traits such as resilience and determination, the autonomy given to students in CCAs can stand them in good stead when they become adults, teachers say.

At Dunman High School, students can initiate activities similar to CCAs on an ad-hoc basis. Such student-initiated interest groups (SIGs) include one on Fashion Studies, which staged runway shows before the pandemic.

Ms Ilyana Hardianti, HOD of CCA at the school, says: "It's very student-driven. We want to keep them engaged in a safe environment and to have fun. Such groups



Archery (left) is one of 19 co-curricular activities offered at Maris Stella High School.
ST PHOTO: THADDEUS ANG

give them a chance to test some of their ideas. In school, we want to prepare them for the future."

For instance, those who wish to form an SIG must submit 20 names for the activity to go ahead. They also have to source for a teacher adviser themselves, which involves persuading a teacher, who would already have his or her own CCA, to take on the additional load.

Dunman High School has 40 CCAs and seven SIGs.

Ms Ilyana says the bonds formed among CCA mates can surpass those among classmates in secondary school, as students may change classes after Secondary 2 based on their selection of subjects.

Some alumni members still come back to train juniors in ultimate frisbee at Dunman High, she says.

Wan Fuhan, a Secondary 2 student at Dunman High, is enjoying doing Beijing opera as a CCA.

The 14-year-old has learnt, for in-

stance, that the actions of female characters in Beijing opera are more detailed and complicated than that of male characters, who can express their emotions more directly.

She is excited about the group's upcoming performance of cross-dressing Chinese war heroine Mulan.

She says: "We learn a new thing almost every CCA lesson and we talk about it even after the session."

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