

## Scifest@School Santa Sabina

Having visited the BT Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition 2012 with all our first years we were anxious, on returning to school, to harness their enthusiasm. We met as a department and decided that it would be a good idea if all first years had to carry out an investigation/project as part of their end of year assessment. Then we discovered *SciFest@School* and a whole new initiative for our school began.

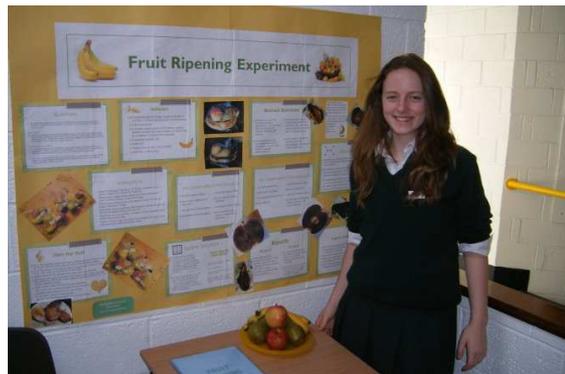
The most important aspect of *SciFest@School* is that you set the agenda for your own school. Using the resources provided by Sheila Porter of SciFest, we were able to plan an event that suited our students and teachers. Three classes carried out investigations and one class participated in a safety poster competition. In our school each teacher allocated one single science lesson a week for three weeks to get the students started and gave them the following criteria:



- You must have a question you want to answer.
- You must outline how you went about answering that question.
- You must show your results.
- You must relate your results to your question

The students were given four weeks, including midterm break, to complete their investigations.

On February 29<sup>th</sup> our inaugural *SciFest@School* event took place and was a tremendous success. 120 students were involved, with 40 investigation projects, and 24 safety posters on display on the notice boards and corridors. SciFest provided two judges, and we invited two retired teachers from the school to come back as judges for the morning. Using the SciFest resources we designed our own judging rubric, which placed emphasis on the aspects we felt were important and relevant to our students. We held quizzes and competitions throughout the morning to keep the participants entertained while judging took place. We invited parents to come in to view the projects for one hour of the morning, and the time flew by. Sheila Porter brought some prizes and freebies for spot prizes, and we had organised some prizes from the school principal, Catherine Cavanagh. In addition every child received a *SciFest@School* certificate of participation, and every group was visited by a judge who discussed their investigation with them. The response from students, parents and teachers has been very positive.



What do we see as the benefits of running a *Scifest@School* event?

- The students got to present their investigations in their own school, and so were not intimidated by the process. This was facilitated in no small way by our judges, who showed interest and enthusiasm for every project and left every group feeling that they had done a great job. It is this inclusivity aspect of SciFest that makes it stand out from other competitions.
- We set the agenda, and designed the event in the way we felt would best suit the teachers and students in our school.
- The event was given status because SciFest provided judges. In addition this helped to foster student/teacher relations, as the students saw us as their allies in this process.
- First years participating in this event had to carry out an investigation, and as such were exposed to the idea of fair testing, variables etc. This will serve as preparation for the Course Work B component of their junior cert. For this reason we could justify spending a small amount of class time assisting the students.
- Students learned from each other by reading other projects.
- It resulted in very positive exposure for science in the school, as all other year groups also got to see the event, as they passed by on their way to and from classes.



We took a bit of a leap into the dark in organising this event, as we had never had anything similar. However the enthusiasm of the staff and students, and the support of Sheila Porter of SciFest, resulted in the staging of an event which we were all proud to be part of. We are already thinking of next year ....bigger and better! We are definitely hooked on *SciFest@School*.

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