

SISSA for Schools

Evaluation report for the academic year 2025-2026

Trieste, 2 October 2026
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SISSA for Schools

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1. Executive summary

The academic year 2025-26 was the thirteenth year of **SISSA for Schools (S4S)**, a highly successful free program dedicated to classes of all grades, known and appreciated not only locally, but also outside Trieste and the Friuli Venezia Giulia region.

At the heart of the program are the Thursday visits, during which pupils meet researchers, explore the School and participate in interactive activities. The program is complemented by various spin-off initiatives, such as orientation programs and other outreach activities. All activities are coordinated by SISSA's in-house company [SISSA Medialab](#). For this academic year, the S4S Thursday visits for high school classes were funded by the Educating Future Citizens (EFC) network.

In the academic year 2025-26, SISSA for Schools and its spin-off were structured as follows:

- **Thursday visits.** The traditional program of SISSA for Schools, involving more than 500 guests, in which one or two school classes are welcomed at SISSA's premises every Thursday morning from October to May.
- ***Il mondo dei dati: tra ricerca e società*** (The world of data: between research and society). A 15-hour university orientation program, delivered in three different editions, to introduce students from high school final years to the world of scientific research, with a particular focus on data science and AI.
- **Visits to SISSA for other groups.** Starting in 2024, SISSA has decided to open its doors to small groups other than school classes, in a format similar to SISSA for Schools visits.
- **School activities for *Trieste Next*.** In September 2025, during the *Trieste Next* festival, S4S offered two activities for schools.
- ***Parole di Scienza*.** The second edition of this project was carried out from November to April: a course aimed at introducing young people to the world of scientific research and careers in STEAM disciplines. The program took place in 10 high schools throughout the Friuli Venezia Giulia region.
- **School workshops for *Scienza e Virgola*.** In April and May a new series of workshops for primary and secondary schools was offered as part of the *Scienza e Virgola* festival, inspired by two newly published books. The activities took place in 17 schools throughout the Friuli Venezia Giulia region.

Overall, in 2025-2026 the program involved **slightly more than 1400 visitors** (see [Table 1](#)). Moreover, some of the projects engaged students over a longer period of time, rather than just a single morning.

All the activities of the program **involved SISSA doctoral students and researchers** (more than 60) with the support and organization of **SISSA Medialab**. Medialab staff designed the program, took care of the organization, trained and coached the volunteers, and facilitated all the events. On staff: Elvira Antonucci, Laura Busato, Francesco Calogiuri, Aurora Corbelli, Marta Fornasier, Francesca Rizzato and Federica Sgorbissa. On two occasions the activities also involved two external collaborators: Chiara Andolfi for *Scienza e Virgola* workshops and Lorenzo Carta for one of the visits to SISSA for other groups.

S4S is a member of eucu.net, the international network of Children's Universities. Children's universities are educational programs that are born inside universities in partnership with schools, that offer children a wide range of activities, including workshops, seminars, and field trips, designed to stimulate curiosity, encourage creativity, and foster a lifelong love of learning.

1.1 Objectives

S4S promotes SISSA, its international status and the quality of its research to the younger generation, particularly to children and adolescents living in the Friuli Venezia Giulia region. S4S aims to show young people, from an early age, how research is performed and managed at SISSA, through its scientists, technicians and administrative staff, thus offering a realistic picture of what science and the daily life of scientists are all about.

The goals of S4S, since the birth of the program, can be summarized as follows:

- **Foster vocational interest.** One of the goals of science communication is to inspire a genuine passion for science and foster a sense of vocation. By sharing the enthusiasm and passion that researchers bring to their work, and showcasing the diversity, creativity, and societal impact of scientific work, we aim to ignite interest, nurture natural aptitudes, and help young people feel that a scientific career could be right for them. In this way, we hope to build a future pipeline of talented individuals who see themselves as part of the scientific community.
- **Empower informed citizens.** In an increasingly complex world, it is essential for citizens to make informed decisions on pressing issues that involve science (e.g. artificial intelligence). The scientific community must therefore find ways to communicate effectively with all members of society, recognizing that citizens' emotions and knowledge play a role in the governance of science and technology. In this context, science communication is crucial in building scientific literacy, providing reliable information on current research, and offering a scientific perspective on societal issues. By cultivating scientific citizenship in young people - the adults of tomorrow - we aim to foster a sense of ownership on scientific research and encourage behaviors that support sustainable progress.
- **Promote inclusion.** The program aims at creating accessible encounters with the world of research for all young people. For this reason the program is free of charge and

participants are full classes rather than individual children enrolled by parents, thereby reducing biases related to different social contexts. We also provide linguistic support to non-Italian-speaking students by pairing them with volunteers who speak their language. We also work closely with special needs teachers to accommodate neurodivergent students, offering materials such as ear defender headphones and fidget toys to support their engagement.

- **Build trust, fight prejudices and change stereotypes.** Without trust in the scientific community, even well-established facts and data can be met with skepticism by large segments of the public. Earning this trust and being seen as a reliable partner requires consistent and transparent communication. When it comes to scientists, there are many stereotypes that can hinder this communication. Therefore, we aim to dismantle them through direct contact with SISSA's researchers. After the visit, students come away with a broader understanding that scientists can be both men and women, young and approachable, and, much like everyone else, dedicated and friendly individuals. They discover that science can come in many forms: many scientists work with numbers, graphs, models, and computers in their daily routines, and not necessarily with chemicals and test tubes.
- **Promote a sense of ownership for science-related places,** such as universities and research institutes. Children and young people sometimes perceive universities as distant places, to which they do not belong. They feel like such places are dedicated to expert adults and possibly the ones close to them (e.g. their families and friends). With this program SISSA desires to be perceived as a welcoming and open institution for all.
- **Get support.** The scientific community cannot operate without the support of our society, which provides direct funding or, indirectly, legislation that facilitates scientific and technological research.

In other words, S4S mission is to support the development of a scientific citizenship for all, not just to promote scientific careers among young children.

We present science as a vital, useful, beautiful human activity, made by many passionate, intelligent, professional young women and men coming from many different countries. And a fundamental and powerful tool for a socially and environmentally sustainable development.

2. SISSA for Schools and its spin-off

In this chapter, we provide an overview of the SISSA for Schools and its spin-off activities carried out during the 2025-26 school year.

2.1 Thursday's school visits

This year, 23 visits were organized on Thursday mornings between 16 October 2025 and 28 May 2026, welcoming a total of 484 pupils and 54 accompanying teachers. S4S visitors belonged to 20 different schools from Friuli Venezia Giulia (Trieste, Muggia, Udine, Fogliano Redipuglia, Cividale del Friuli) and from outside the region (Oderzo, Modena, Vicenza).

Pupils of all ages, from second graders to high school seniors, participated in the Thursday program. This year we hosted 10 primary school groups, 7 junior high school groups, and 7 high school groups (see [Appendix 1](#) for the comprehensive list), including the two special encounters organized for Università Svelate and International Day of Children's Universities. Three additional dates had been scheduled for high school classes, two of which were from outside the province of Trieste. However, unforeseen circumstances arose at very short notice and the classes were unable to attend. Despite efforts to reschedule or identify replacement classes, it was not possible to arrange alternative participation at such short notice.

We generally hosted one or two classes at a time, depending on their size, to ensure there was a meaningful exchange between the pupils and the volunteers during the activities.

We offered a free one-way shuttle bus to all classes that needed it, often directly from their schools, in order to avoid congesting public transport to SISSA which is already heavily used in the morning hours. Classes were instead encouraged to use public transport when they had to return to school at the end of the morning.

The registration process took place on 27 May and was publicized in the previous days through the SISSA for Schools newsletter and social media, and through SISSA social media. We received 126 requests for 26 available Thursdays. All available places were filled within minutes of the call opening, clearly demonstrating that demand far exceeded the program's capacity. Selection was based primarily on the order of booking, but priority was given to classes that had not previously participated in visits, in order to reach new groups of students. Efforts were also made to ensure a balanced representation of different school types and grade levels.

The list of S4S seminars and activities is continuously increasing and can be found in [this separate document](#), categorized by age group and main discipline.

Special days

On March 19, one day ahead of National Universities Day, a special SISSA for Schools session was held as part of the [Università Svelate](#) (Universities Unveiled) initiative. Similarly, on April 9, during the week of the [International Day of Children's Universities](#), another special session was held.

Visits' program

A typical SISSA for Schools morning consists of a series of activities designed to alternate moments of scientific exploration with opportunities for dialogue. It normally takes place in the Big Meeting Room (when available).



Figure 1: Left side: Interactive seminar for junior high schools by Alessandro Vici "How does an airplane fly?". Right side: Interactive activity for primary schools within the seminar "Dido and the mathematical solution".

- 1. Introduction to SISSA.** The morning begins with a short introduction to SISSA and the PhD program, allowing students to learn more about the School and become familiar with the academic path followed by PhD students after completing university. The introduction includes a welcome video by the SISSA Director, Prof. Andrea Romanino, and a quick presentation of the institution.
- 2. Seminar by a researcher.** The introduction is followed by a researcher's seminar focusing on their own work. All talks are developed in collaboration with SISSA Medialab staff, with the aim of adapting the content to the age of the participants and making it engaging and interactive.
- 3. Break.** A break is held in the garden, where students can also enjoy playful experiences ranging from optical illusions to sound-based games. In case of bad weather, the break takes place in the canteen.

4. Interactive activity. The morning continues with one of the following activities. The activity is chosen based on the participants' age and school level, the context, the time available and the specific needs of the class.

- **Treasure hunt.** Aimed at primary school classes, the main purpose of the activity is to allow participants to explore SISSA in small groups and discover the School with greater autonomy. Each group is accompanied by a researcher or a SISSA Medialab facilitator and visits some of the School's key locations while meeting different members of the SISSA community along the way.
- **Discussion game.** The discussion game offered during the visit is an activity designed specifically for junior high school students. It aims to stimulate discussion about the impact of scientific and technological advances on everyday life, the society, the economy and the environment. Through guided questions and activities, participants are encouraged to express their opinions, support their arguments, and listen to others' perspectives, thereby developing critical thinking and communication skills.
- **Research explained with a box.** The aim of this activity is to gain first-hand experience of how research works, with a particular focus on the collaborative nature of the development of scientific knowledge. Students are divided into small groups, each taking on the role of a research team. Each group receives a sealed box containing one or more hidden objects. After formulating hypotheses, making observations, and conducting experiments, the students present their findings in a simulation of a scientific conference. The activity can be tailored differently to suit students of all ages.
- **Guided tour of SISSA.** This activity is aimed at high school pupils and is designed to establish a direct dialogue with those working in the field of research. The class is divided into small groups, each accompanied by a researcher. During the tour of the School, students have the opportunity to engage in informal conversations, asking questions both about the researchers' scientific work and about their personal and professional journeys.

2.2 SISSA for Schools' spin-off

***Il mondo dei dati: tra ricerca e società* (The world of data: between research and society)**

This program offers an orientation course of 15 hours for high school students aimed at providing them a concrete and up-to-date understanding of scientific careers and the world of scientific research, with a particular focus on data science and artificial intelligence.

This year three editions took place, in September, November, and February, involving a total of 66 students in their final two years of scientific high school, from the “A. Einstein” Institute in Cervignano (I.S.I.S. Bassa Friulana) and the “Michelangelo Buonarroti” Institute in Monfalcone.

The program has been held as part of a national initiative that involves all Italian Universities and is funded by the Ministry of Education (DM 934/2022) for the September and February editions, while the November edition was funded by the Educating Future Citizens (EFC) network.

Further details regarding this program are available in the [annual report for the specific initiative](#).

Visits to SISSA for other groups

Starting in 2024, SISSA decided to open its doors to small groups other than school classes. These groups may consist of university students or special interest groups. The structure of the visits is partially tailored to the type of audience and benefits from the experience gained through the SISSA for Schools program. As a result, these visits still involve the participation of volunteer researchers and are organized and facilitated by SISSA Medialab.

In the 2025-26 school year, five visits were organized:

1. **German Italian Physics Exchange (GIPE) on September 18.** A group of 55 university students attended presentations by SISSA professors on the School's main physics research areas, followed by a discussion game on open access in scientific publishing.
2. **Visit for *Biologia molecolare in azione* on December 9.** A group of 22 participants from Liceo Galileo Galilei visited SISSA and its laboratories as part of a multi-institutional STEM career guidance initiative.
3. **Associazione Volontariato Opicina on February 3.** A group of 35 members attended a seminar and took part in a guided tour of SISSA.
4. **Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) on March 25.** A group of 100 university students attended a presentation on SISSA and its research areas, followed by a short seminar and a guided tour of the school.
5. **Viva Marga school contest group on May 26.** A group of 34 people from the classes that won the *Viva Marga* contest visited SISSA and took part in a discussion game on science and society.

School activities for *Trieste Next*

SISSA for Schools managed SISSA's school program at the *Trieste Next* 2025 festival on Friday, September 27. Two sessions were organized: one for a primary school class centered on plankton as seen through the eyes of a physicist, and another for a high school class on how memory works.

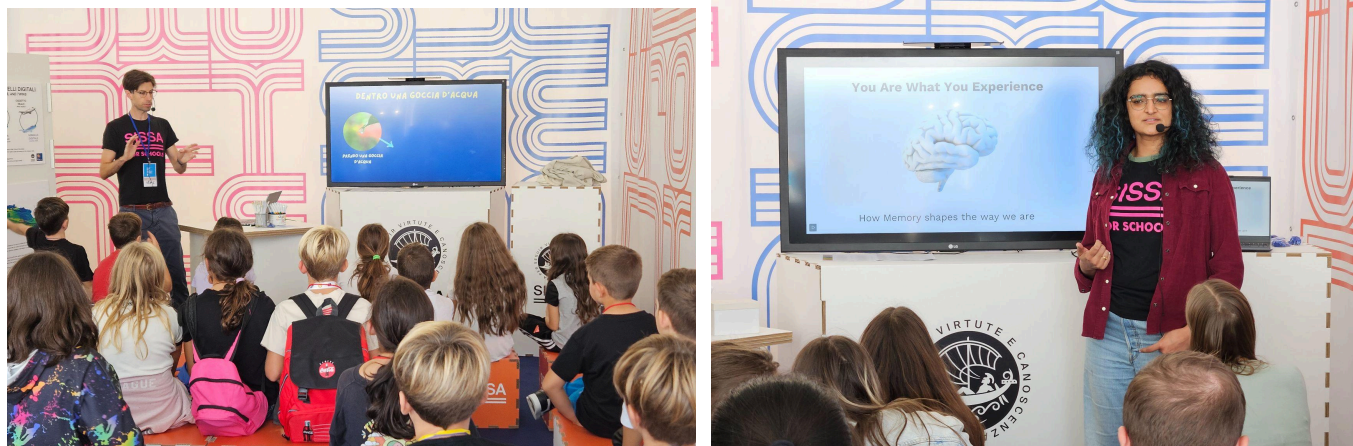


Figure 2: *Trieste Next 2025*. Left side: Seminar “The life in a drop of water” for a primary school class by Régis Turuban. Right side: Seminar “You are what you experience: how memory shapes the way we are” for a high school class by Yukti Chopra.

Parole di Scienza

Parole di Scienza is a workshop developed by SISSA Medialab as part of the program *AttivaScuola* and funded by the Friuli Venezia Giulia region. Held for the first time during the 2024-25 school year, this year the course involved 211 students from 10 different high schools across Friuli Venezia Giulia, between November and April.

Compared with the previous edition, which focused on science journalism, this year the course was more focused on introducing students to the world of research and offering them perspectives for their career choices. The program included collaborative workshop activities on the scientific method and the interdisciplinarity of scientific careers, as well as a seminar led by a researcher from SISSA.

Further details regarding this program are available in the annual report for the specific initiative.

School workshops for *Scienza e Virgola*

[*Scienza e Virgola*](#) is the science book festival organized by SISSA's Interdisciplinary Laboratory for Natural and Humanistic Sciences (ILAS). For the 2026 edition, the tenth one, SISSA Medialab developed two one-hour workshops for schools, inspired by two newly published books. The first workshop *Di ramo in ramo* (From branch to branch) was focused on botany and designed for primary school students, while the second, *Intelligenza artificiale: tutta questione di allenamento* (Artificial Intelligence: it's all about training), explored reinforcement learning and was intended for junior high school and high school students. Overall, the workshops reached 17 schools in 17 different municipalities across the Friuli Venezia Giulia region, involving 138 primary school students, 49 junior high school students, 63 high school students and 34 teachers.



Figure 3: *Scienza e Virgola* 2026. Left side: workshop *Di ramo in ramo* for primary school classes. Right side: Workshop *Intelligenza artificiale: tutta questione di allenamento* for junior high and high school classes.

2.3 SISSA for Schools and its spin-off in numbers

School visits on Thursday	
Pupils and teachers	484 + 54
Number of visits	23
Classes	24
Schools	20
Volunteers involved	45
<i>Il mondo dei dati: tra ricerca e società</i>	
Pupils and teachers	66 + 8
Classes	5
Schools	2
Number of hours per class	15
Volunteers involved	7
<i>Trieste Next</i>	
Pupils and teachers	37 + 4
Classes	2
Schools	2
Volunteers involved	2
Visits to SISSA for other groups	
Number of participants	246
Number of visits	5
Volunteers involved	23

Parole di Scienza	
Pupils and teachers	211 + 10
Classes	10
Schools	10
Number of hours per class	4
Volunteers involved	4
Scienza e Virgola	
Pupils and teachers	250 + 34
Classes	19
Schools	17
Total number of participants involved	1404 ¹
Total number of volunteers involved²	62
SISSA Medialab staff and collaborators involved	9

Table 1: SISSA for Schools and its spin-off activities for the school year 2025-26 in numbers

2.4 SISSA volunteers' recruitment and training

The school program relies strongly on the active participation of SISSA doctoral students and postdocs, as well as several senior researchers and technical staff.

The interaction between SISSA volunteers and visitors benefits both parties. The latter learn more about research as a profession and the research topics of SISSA scientists, while the volunteers have the opportunity to improve their communication skills, as well as the satisfaction of sharing their passion with a curious audience.

On October the 8th, at the beginning of the school year, an **initial meeting**, promoted to all SISSA staff, was organized by Medialab with the support and participation of the SISSA Director. During the meeting, Medialab staff presented the S4S program and some of the previous year's volunteers shared their experience.

Throughout the whole school year, SISSA Medialab provided volunteers with continuous organizational support, as well as professional **one-to-one coaching** in the preparation of seminars, activities and supporting materials.

Additionally, volunteers were offered a **program of training workshops and other opportunities to explore science communication**, provided at no cost as part of their participation in SISSA for Schools. Attendance was optional, and each volunteer could independently register for the modules most relevant to their interests and needs.

¹ The number of teachers involved may be slightly lower than reported in Table 1, as some of them may have participated in more than one activity with different classes.

² Fifteen volunteers participated in more than one of the projects listed in Table 1.

The training program offered is presented in [Table 2](#).

Date	Module or activity description	Led by	No. participants
10/10/2025	<i>Bases of science communication</i> , 3-hours workshop	SISSA Medialab staff	15
10/10/2025	<i>How to handle interviews</i> , 2-hours workshop	SISSA Medialab staff	15
02-05/12/2025	Free participation for a limited amount of Italian-speaking volunteers to the Convegno Nazionale di Comunicazione della Scienza (CNCS)	-	6
12/12/2025	Visit to the science center Immaginario Scientifico	SISSA Medialab and Immaginario Scientifico staff	13
20/01/2026	<i>Build your own talk</i> , 4-hours workshop	SISSA Medialab staff	7
10/02/2026	<i>Public speaking</i> , 4-hours workshop	TEDx expert Enrico Gentina	14

Table 2: List of training modules for S4S volunteers during the school year 2025-26.

In the 2025-26 school year, compared with the previous year, the training program for volunteers was expanded to include new opportunities, such as the modules *How to handle interviews* and *Public speaking*, giving volunteers the possibility to develop more practical communication skills. Volunteers were also offered free participation in the *Convegno Nazionale di Comunicazione della Scienza*, organized by ILAS. As one of Italy's main forums for science communication, the conference offered volunteers a valuable opportunity to meet science communication professionals, researchers, and educators from across the country, exchange ideas, and gain first-hand insight into current debates and practices in the field. Finally, another new opportunity was the group visit to the science center *Immaginario Scientifico*, which gave participants the chance to explore different approaches to engaging the public with science and to reflect on science communication in an informal learning environment. All these initiatives are valuable not only for improving skills and expanding knowledge, but also for encouraging exchange among participants and strengthening the sense of community within the group.

Starting last year, a dedicated **office hour** was introduced on Thursday afternoons, from 16:00 to 17:00, for volunteers involved in the SISSA for Schools program. During this time, a SISSA Medialab staff member responsible for the project was available in a specific room near to the SISSA entrance hall to answer questions, provide support, and coach volunteers in developing new activities and seminars related to their research. The office hour was conceived also as a welcoming opportunity for new potential volunteers, offering an open and informal setting to learn

about the project. The hour was frequently used by volunteers, confirming its value as a space for dialogue and co-design.

SISSA Medialab provided all volunteers with a SISSA for Schools branded T-shirts. The T-shirt, which identifies the S4S crew during meetings, is also a valued sign of belonging and a nice souvenir to take with you at the end of your time at SISSA. An additional gadget was donated to volunteers who challenged themselves to produce a talk: a SISSA for Schools shopper bag.

2.5 SISSA for Schools new website

Between September and October 2025, SISSA Medialab redesigned and rebuilt the [SISSA for Schools website](#), simplifying both its content and structure to make basic information clearer and more accessible to its different audiences. The new website is organized into three main sections, *About the project*, *Teachers* and *Volunteers*, presenting the program, its activities and practical information for teachers and volunteers.

At present, the volunteer page is available in both Italian and English, while the other sections are available in Italian only, as they are primarily intended for local schools and teachers. A complete English translation of the website may be developed in the future to ensure greater accessibility and consistency.

When developing the website, particular attention was devoted to the volunteer page, which now brings together all the information relevant to the SISSA community. It provides an overview of the activities and available roles, the level of commitment required, the training opportunities and how to participate, while a comprehensive FAQ section addresses the most common practical questions.

3. Evaluation

The evaluation of the main track of the S4S program - the Thursday's visits - was performed collecting data from teachers, pupils and researchers through **different evaluation methods**.

Questionnaires were administered to teachers, high school students and volunteers. For primary school pupils, feedback was collected through free messages and drawings on post-it notes. For junior high school students, the evaluation varied depending on the activity: in the case of a discussion game, teachers completed an observation grid provided by SISSA Medialab, while in the other cases students completed a short feedback form.

The questionnaires, in digital or paper format, depending on the context and the participants' ages, included a series of open questions and a quantitative scoring system on various aspects of the visits. The evaluation used a 1-to-4 or a 1-to-10 rating scale depending on the needs: a 1-to-4 scale was used to encourage respondents to take a clear position by avoiding a neutral midpoint, a 1-to-10 scale, which allows for a more nuanced evaluation, was adopted where required for Educating Future Citizens (EFC) network reporting requirements.

Qualitative considerations were collected from teachers and pupils directly during the visit or immediately after, and were always very positive, often enthusiastic.

The overall impression is that this experience has been on average very positive and the results of the questionnaires confirm a high level of satisfaction in teachers, pupils and SISSA volunteers. The aspects that received the highest ratings from both teachers and students were the interactive nature of the environment and the competence and charisma of SISSA's volunteers. Further details are provided in the following paragraphs.

3.1 Evaluation: teachers

The questionnaire was sent through a Google form link at the end of each visit; 16 teachers answered for the 23 Thursday visits. The questionnaire included 11 questions exploring objectives and the expected outcomes, assessing the visit experience and asking for comments and suggestions. For junior high school classes participating in the discussion game activity, teachers filled in the same online questionnaire as all other teachers, supplemented by four additional questions specifically relating to the discussion game. The full text of the questionnaire, the observation grid for the discussion game and the collection of responses to the open-ended questions are available in [Appendix 2](#).

3.1.1 Objectives and expected outcomes for the visit

The responses indicate that most teachers, regardless of school level, shared the objective of introducing students to a local research institution and raising awareness about the profession of the scientist. For high school and junior high school teachers, the visits also served as an

orientation opportunity, helping students explore potential academic and career paths. Primary school teachers, on the other hand, placed greater emphasis on introducing pupils to local institutions, while sparking curiosity about subjects that are often perceived as challenging.

Here are some excerpts of the teachers' answers regarding their objectives, reported in the original Italian to preserve their meaning and avoid distortion through translation:

Mostrare le possibilità che ci sono a livello post-universitario; orientamento; cura dell'eccellenza; uscire dal seminato e mostrare qualcosa che va oltre.
(High school teacher)

Orientare gli studenti, far loro conoscere dei professionisti e degli ambienti che comunemente non incontrano per poter prendere consapevolezza delle realtà locali, delle possibilità di formazione per il futuro.
(Junior high school teacher)

Offrire una motivazione del perché si affrontano alcune materie a scuola (matematica, scienze...) che a volte sembrano difficili. Dare uno sguardo alle possibilità future.
(Primary school teacher)

The vast majority of respondents found the visit highly relevant to their initial objectives and expected outcomes: 13 out of 16 teachers rated this aspect 4 out of 4 ("fully"), while the remaining 3 gave it a score of 3 ("largely").

3.1.2 Visit experience

Teachers were generally very satisfied with the overall visit experience. On average, they rated the level of interest at 3.8, enjoyment at 3.6, and interactivity at 3.5, all on a scale from 1 to 4. The appropriateness of the content for the students' age and knowledge received a 3.6, the competence and friendliness of the presenters received a 3.9, and the organization of the activities a 3.8. The distribution of responses is shown in [Figure 4](#).

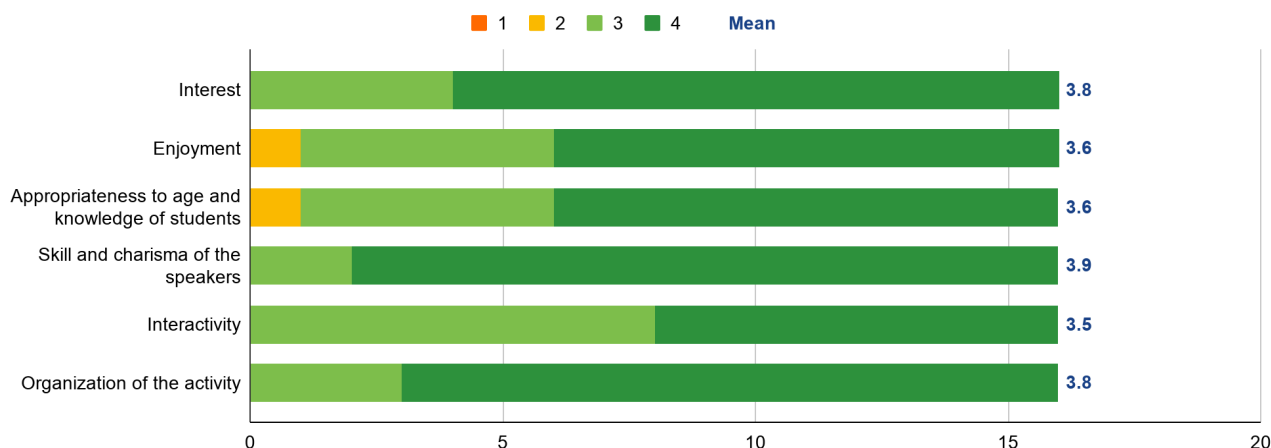


Figure 4: Answers to the question "Please rate the following aspects on a scale of 1 to 4". The **mean** rating is shown in **blue** at the end of the line.

Teachers particularly appreciated the availability and professionalism of both volunteers and staff, highlighting the volunteers' ability to establish a direct dialogue with students, actively engage them and stimulate their curiosity. They also valued the interactive nature of the activities, the good organization of the program, the welcoming learning environment, the focus on current scientific topics and the use of language appropriate to the students' age.

The presence of researchers is regarded by teachers as the most valuable aspect of the program. Across all school levels, teachers expressed a strong interest in engaging directly with researchers, learning about their working environment, and gaining a deeper understanding of the scientific approach.

Among the 16 respondents, all stated that, if given the opportunity, they would involve additional classes in the program.

One of the questions in the questionnaire asked teachers whether their students were able to participate in seminars held in English, as many volunteers from the SISSA community do not speak Italian. None of the high school teachers reported language difficulties. However, three out of eight junior high school teachers and eight out of ten primary school teachers indicated that the use of English posed a challenge for their students. This supports our current approach of offering English-language activities exclusively to high schools, and only after confirming with the teacher that it is feasible.

Overall, teachers expressed very few criticisms of the program. The most common suggestions were to include a visit to the SISSA laboratories, to add more hands-on activities and to encourage greater student participation during seminars and discussions. Other comments concerned isolated practical issues, such as allowing more time for breaks, providing a space for packed lunches, and improving the room conditions.

3.1.3 Suggestions and preferences for future visits

Many respondents used the "Suggestions and preferences for future visits" section of the questionnaire to compliment the initiative and thank the organization. Others, in this section as well, showed a desire to visit SISSA laboratories.

Here are some excerpts from teachers' comments regarding their visit experience:

Complimenti per l'organizzazione e grazie.
(Primary school teacher)

Un ringraziamento per il continuo lavoro che fate e per la possibilità che date alle scuole.
(Junior high school teacher)

Organizzare attività laboratoriali sarebbe molto utile per gli studenti di scuola superiore, che spesso accedono raramente a dei laboratori.
(High school teacher)

Grazie per l'importante occasione che offrite agli studenti.
(High school teacher)

3.3 Evaluation: pupils

3.3.1 Evaluation: primary schools

The evaluation for primary school students was conducted using free-form messages and drawings on post-its to capture what had impressed the children during their visit. At the end of the visit, we set aside time for the children to create these drawings, which we collected directly. We also gave them the opportunity to personally deliver their messages and drawings to one (or more) of the volunteers they met during the morning. This heartfelt gesture of gratitude is greatly appreciated by the volunteers, who are often delighted and surprised, and many choose to hang the children's artwork in their offices.

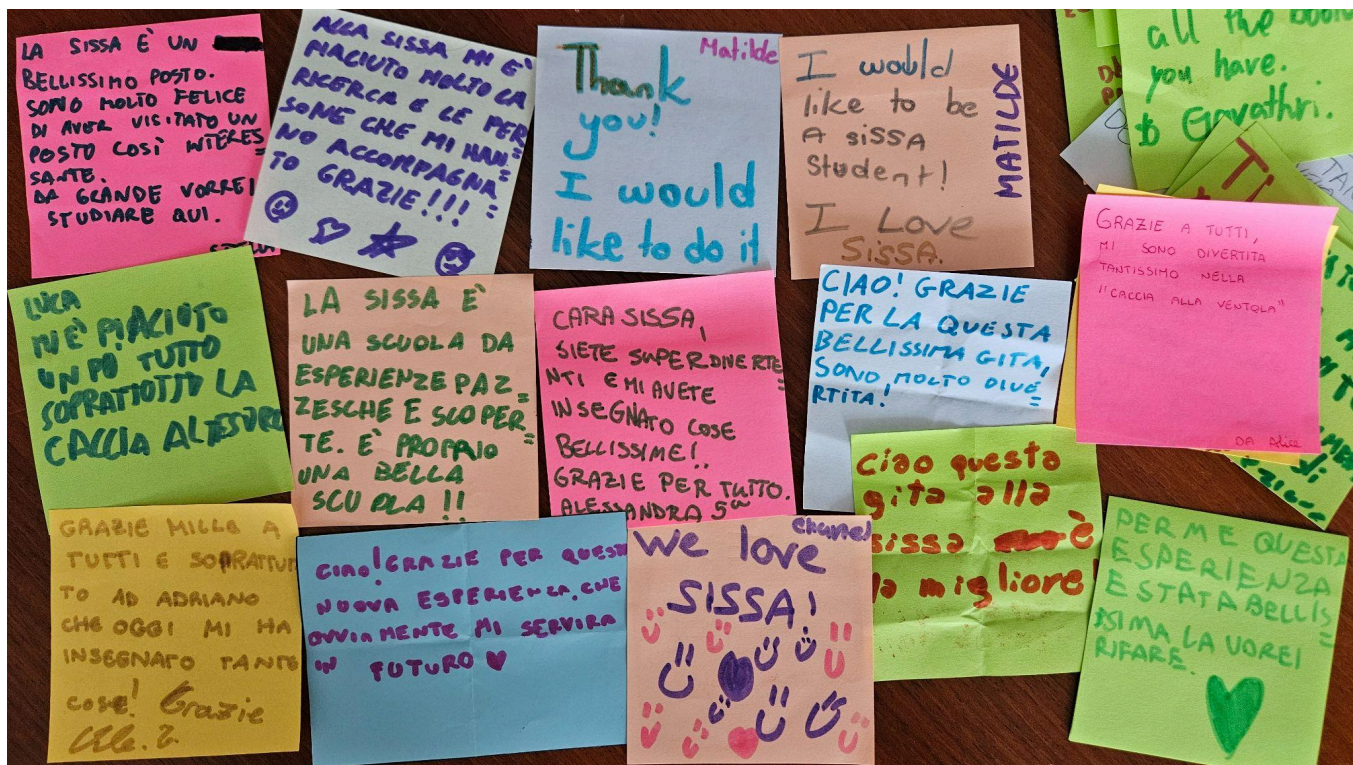


Figure 5: Examples of messages and drawings shared by primary school pupils at the end of their visits.

3.2 Evaluation: junior high schools

During the 2025-26 school year, a new type of evaluation for junior high school classes was tested, with the aim of assessing how students engaged in the discussion game activity.

Teachers were involved as external observers and asked to fill out an observation grid during the activity, which was facilitated by SISSA Medialab staff. This served a double purpose: it provided an additional perspective on students' participation and, at the same time, gave teachers a specific role during the discussion game while offering a space where students can express themselves freely. The observation grid can be found in the [Appendix](#).

This made it possible to test a structured approach to evaluating the discussion game and provided some additional information on participation and group dynamics. However, several practical limitations emerged. The task was not always easy to explain clearly to teachers in the short time available and the observation grid proved to be relatively difficult and demanding to complete. Furthermore, in some cases, the data collected regarding the same event differed depending on the observer's perception, highlighting a difficulty in completing the task in an objective and consistent manner.

For these reasons, we do not report the detailed results of this evaluation here, and the scheme will be reconsidered for the next school year.

3.3.2 Evaluation: high schools

The questionnaire was administered through an anonymous Google form, with the link shared directly with the students at the end of each visit. Six visits were dedicated to high school students, and 114 pupils responded out of 130 who participated.

The questionnaire asked students to rate various aspects of the activities, including how interesting they considered them, whether they learned something new, and whether it inspired them to explore scientific topics further. It also assessed their appreciation of the researcher's presentation style and skills. Additional questions focused on their favorite and least favorite parts of the day, whether they would like to repeat the experience with other researchers, and if they felt comfortable participating in activities conducted in English. The form ended with space for suggestions and comments. The full text of the questionnaire and the collected responses to the open-ended questions are available in [Appendix 2](#).

Students were asked to rate their overall appreciation of the visit on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 10 (very much). Overall, **the experience was rated very positively**, receiving an average score of 8.3. The distribution of responses is shown in 6.

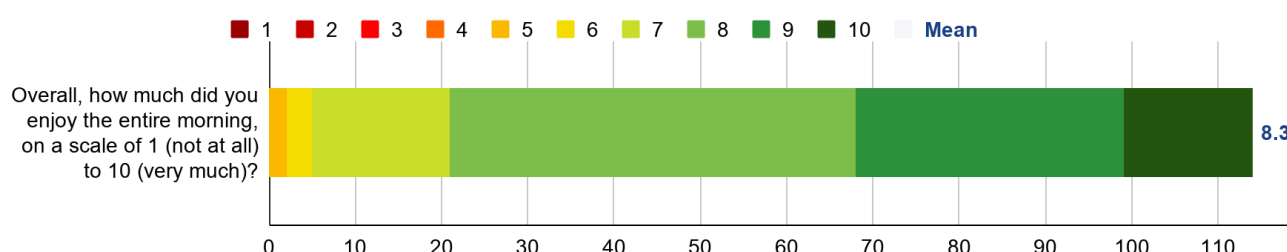


Figure 7: Answers to the question "Overall, how much did you enjoy the entire morning on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 10 (very much)?". The **mean** rating is shown in **blue** at the end of the line.

The pupils generally provided very positive feedback for the **seminar/activity proposed by a researcher**. On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 10 (very much), the seminar/activity was rated as interesting with an average score of 7.6, and students felt that they learned new things, giving it a score of 7.5. However, the desire to further explore scientific topics was slightly lower, with an average score of 6.7. The highest rating, 8.6, was for the researcher's friendliness and competence, indicating strong appreciation for the researchers' presentation style. This also reflects last year's evaluations, which showed the same outcome.

Students also provided generally positive feedback to the **SISSA tour with the volunteers**. The activity was rated highly for being interesting, with an average score of 8.2 on a scale from 1 to 10. They also felt that they learned new things, with a score of 7.4. The tour inspired some students to further explore scientific topics, scoring 6.9 in this category. Again, the highest rating was given for the friendliness and competence of the researchers, which received a 9.0.

Students widely appreciated all the proposed activities and the direct and informal interaction with researchers. In particular, the guided tour of SISSA emerged as the most frequently mentioned

highlight of the day (by 43 participants), many enjoyed the opportunity to visit the institute, explore its facilities, and experience the research environment firsthand.

Another recurring positive aspect was the opportunity to interact directly with researchers. Students valued the informal conversations, the researchers' openness and availability, and the chance to learn about their research, career paths, and everyday life at SISSA through personal stories and questions. The seminars also received positive feedback and were mentioned as the best part of the visit by 14 participants.

When asked about the least enjoyable aspect, most students had no specific complaints. Among the suggestions for improvement, the most common was the opportunity to visit the neuroscience laboratories. A few students also found the presentations too long or too theoretical and suggested making them more interactive, while the remaining comments referred to minor issues, such as the weather, room temperature, or limited time for discussion.

When asked if they would like to repeat the experience with other researchers, 60 students responded yes, nobody said no, and 54 indicated that it would depend on the topic.

One of the questions in the questionnaire asked students whether they would feel comfortable attending a session entirely in English. Students showed confidence with English activities, with 93 of them responding yes and only 21 saying no. This supports our current decision to provide the option to join a group led in Italian for the SISSA tour, to ensure that the activity is understood and enjoyed even by that minority of students who would not feel comfortable using English when interacting with a researcher.

Finally, 23 students provided open-ended comments. Most of them expressed appreciation and gratitude for the experience, while a few offered suggestions for improvement.

Here are some excerpts from the pupil's questionnaires.

[What was your favorite thing about the day?]

La cosa che mi è piaciuta di più del seminario è sicuramente la disponibilità e la tranquillità del ricercatore nel parlare del suo lavoro e la quantità di informazioni e curiosità che ci ha dato.

[What was your favorite thing about the day?]

Ho conosciuto un approccio completamente nuovo alla conoscenza e all'apprendimento.

[Suggestion and comments]

Fare dei laboratori o almeno poterli vedere sarebbe un ottimo modo per invogliare i ragazzi.

3.4 Evaluation: SISSA volunteers

The evaluation for the volunteers was conducted through an anonymous Google form and was aimed at exploring the volunteers' experiences and reflections on their roles in the program, as

well as gathering suggestions for future improvements. Of the 45 SISSA researchers who participated as speakers or helpers during the Thursday's visits of the 2025-26 school year, 16 responded to the questionnaire. The full text of the questionnaire and the collected responses to the open-ended questions are available in [Appendix 2](#).

The overall feedback was very positive, with answers highlighting as best aspects of the program the interaction with pupils and the valuable connection that is created between kids and research. Particularly appreciated was the opportunity to share their passion for science, explain complex concepts in an accessible way, and present research as a realistic career path. Several also highlighted the program as a valuable opportunity to improve their science communication skills and reconnect with the general public, creating a stimulating bidirectional learning process, useful for anyone at both sides of the table.

Most volunteers reported no significant negative aspects of the program. The few suggestions for improvement concerned organisational issues, such as allowing more time for interactions with students, providing additional guidance for first-time volunteers for the guided tour, involving more senior researchers and ensuring a more balanced distribution of volunteering opportunities among participants.

Finally, volunteers believed that the program helped students gain a better and more realistic understanding of scientific research and researchers' lives. They also felt that the visit sparked curiosity, challenged stereotypes by showing that scientists are ordinary people, and presented science as accessible, engaging, and a possible future career.

Of the 16 respondents, 15 reported that they receive the right amount of email communication from the program, while only one indicated that they would like to receive more updates.

Overall, volunteers showed great interest in **science communication training**: 10 respondents expressed a clear interest, while the remaining 6 were unsure. In-person training was strongly preferred (by 15 out of 16), and all of the proposed training topics received interest from multiple volunteers. Regarding the format, the current structure of independent 4-hour modules was appreciated by 9 respondents, while 13 expressed a preference for more frequent but shorter sessions (approximately one and a half hours each). Regarding the preferred schedule for training, no strong preference emerged between weekday morning and afternoon sessions, although Friday afternoons were the least preferred option.

Of the 16 respondents, 5 volunteers reported having made use of the **dedicated office hour** available to them. Among those who had not, most (8 out of 11) stated that they had not needed it, while four reported that they were unaware of its availability.

Finally, we report here some excerpts from the volunteers' questionnaires.

[Based on your personal experience, what is the best aspect of the S4S program?]

The S4S promotes the formation of a community of scientists, virtually at any level, with the aim of transmitting the passion or the interest for science, not just to the kids from schools but also

among the same persons participating in this project. This is the key and best part; it is a stimulating bidirectional learning process, useful for anyone at both sides of the table.

It makes a valuable connection between kids and research and helps students understand science can be fun and not only difficult.

It created a very relaxed environment where volunteers could connect with the school students, they could ask whichever questions they'd like, and see the building without feeling supervised. It gave a great demonstration of what it is like to study at SISSA.

[Based on your personal experience, what is the worst aspect of the S4S program?]

The worst aspect is to recognize how few senior scientists get part to this project. Those who have the widest and deepest view on science are not there to convey their passion to new generations, or at least try it.

[Is there something that you learnt from this experience?]

Talking to kids and people outside academia about science made me find the motivation back to do science, which sometimes I lose among deadlines and boring and stressful sides of research.

I learned many things that are hard to summarize in a line. To listen more. That what I say sometimes is not what others get. That the voice, body, gestures and other things are all part of the science communication process.

[Final suggestions]

I thought it was a great experience I am very lucky to have been a part of - thank you Elvira!

In addition to the formal evaluations conducted at the end of the year, we were privileged to receive consistent appreciation from the volunteers throughout the school year. In particular, we are honored that our project was considered so enriching that it has been mentioned in the acknowledgments section of the doctoral dissertation of one of our speakers and volunteers.

[...] Thursday mornings with you and the children were often exactly the boost I needed and the answer to the question "Why are you doing this?" at times when my compass had been completely demagnetized by the anxiety of the countless projects and deadlines that so often come with academic life.

4. Gender balance

A key goal for scientific outreach, and thus for the S4S program, is to **promote gender equality and inclusion in scientific research**, where women and minorities are traditionally less represented, and to attract more girls to STEM related careers. Therefore, a specific effort has been carried out since the origin of SISSA for Schools in presenting scientists in the least stereotypical way possible. Facilitators take great care to **encourage a diverse community of volunteers and to use gender-neutral, inclusive language and pictures** when presenting scientists and scientific careers.

Although no volunteers have ever been excluded from the program in order to enforce gender parity, the inclusiveness of the community has so far ensured a **good level of gender balance** (see [Paragraph 4.1](#)).

This is particularly noteworthy because volunteers mostly belong to SISSA's research community, which is heavily biased: women are only 26,7% among research staff (research fellows, researchers, and faculty members) and 28% among students, according to the [2026 SISSA CUG Report](#).

4.1 Gender equality: numbers and participation

We analyse here the gender distribution from two perspectives: participation as a speaker at SISSA for Schools and, more generally, contributions made to all the various activities within S4S and its spin-offs.

4.1.1 Gender balance among speakers during Thursday visits

Speakers play a central role in S4S school visits, accompanying classes for a significant part of the morning at SISSA; their contribution is therefore the first aspect considered in this analysis. We analyse two quantities:

- The percentage of female speakers in the speaker pool. Repeated contributions from a single speaker will not affect this variable.
- The percentage of female speakers' contributions in the annual school visit calendar. In other words, this represents how often the speaker in front of a random pupil at S4S is a woman. Repeated contributions by the same speaker will modify this variable. If multiple speakers were present during a single visit, both contributions will be considered separately.

The former is a measure of gender equality in the volunteer pool, the latter quantifies how the "image" received by guest pupils is skewed toward one gender or the other. This last quantity is, then, the one which is of primary interest to impact on gender stereotypes on scientific careers.

We have studied the evolution of these quantities between 2014 and 2026: data are reported in Figure 8 and [Table 3](#).

Percentage of female speakers in S4S: time evolution

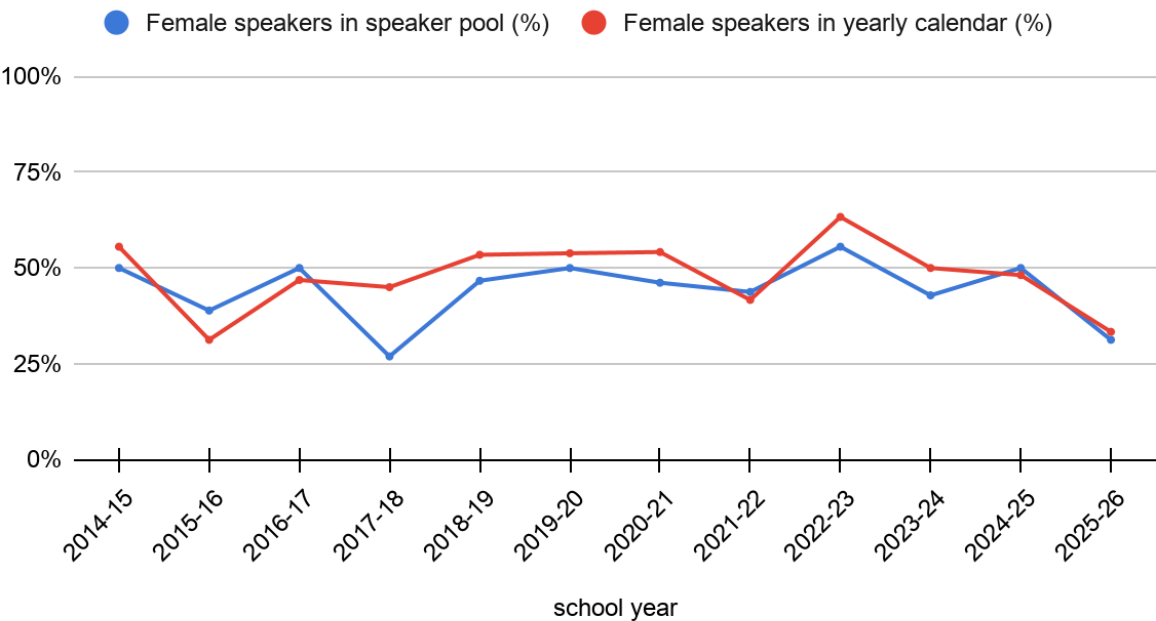


Figure 8: Percentage of female speakers in speaker pool (in blue) and percentage of female speakers in the annual school visit calendar (in red) for the program SISSA for Schools between 2014 and 2026.

School year	Occurrence of female speakers in the annual school visit calendar	Occurrence of male speakers in the annual school visit calendar	Total female speakers	Total male speakers
2014-15	25	20	10	10
2015-16	15	33	7	11
2016-17	15	17	9	9
2017-18	18	22	7	19
2018-19	31	27	14	16
2019-20	14	12	9	9
2020-21	13	11	6	7
2021-22	10	14	7	9
2022-23	19	11	10	8
2023-24	15	15	6	8
2024-25	13	14	10	10
2025-26	8	16	5	11

Table 3: Absolute numbers of speakers per gender in the annual school visit calendar and in the pool of speakers between 2014 and 2026.³

The red curve in [Figure 8](#) shows that, since the beginning of the program and with general stability, S4S participants have interacted with male and female speakers in almost equal proportions, with some year-to-year fluctuations and three more noticeable deviations in 2015-16, 2022-23 and 2025-26.

In fact, in the most recent school year, the proportion of contributions by female speakers decreased and moved closer to the average gender composition of the SISSA research community. Given the relatively small number of speakers involved each year, however, this result may reflect normal statistical variation rather than a lasting change. A similar deviation was observed in the past and was followed by a return to more balanced levels. Moreover, the speaker pool changes considerably from year to year, as most members of the SISSA community remain at the institution for a limited period and each edition therefore involves a partly different group of volunteers.

Alongside the monitoring of overall participation, attention was also paid to gender representation within each individual visit. Every time, we ensured that the group of researchers encountered by students, including both speakers and helpers, included both men and women.

The indicator will continue to be monitored in the coming years to determine whether the 2025-26 result represents an isolated fluctuation or the beginning of a more persistent trend.

4.1.2 Gender balance across SISSA for Schools and its spin-off programs

Although the role of S4S speaker is the most substantial and visible within the core program, researchers take on a variety of roles in SISSA for Schools and its related initiatives. During the S4S Thursday visits, volunteers may also act as S4S helpers, leading groups of students through an interactive activity, such as the treasure hunt or a guided tour of SISSA, as described in [Visit's program](#). These activities typically involve between three and five volunteers, depending on the number of pupils.

Volunteers also contributed to many other S4S spin-off programs: *Il mondo dei dati: tra ricerca e società*, visits to SISSA for other groups, *Trieste Next* and *Parole di Scienza*. To obtain a broader picture of gender representation, we analysed male and female participation across all these activities. The unit considered in the following analysis is the individual contribution rather than the number of unique volunteers: each occasion on which a volunteer took part in an activity was counted as one contribution.

Figure 9 shows that female volunteers **accounted for a substantial share of contributions across the different S4S activities**. When all programs are considered together, women nevertheless emerge as significant and visible contributors to S4S and its related initiatives, despite being slightly less represented overall.

³[Table 3](#) might indicate a decreasing number of speakers along the years, but this is mainly related to a different way S4S is run.

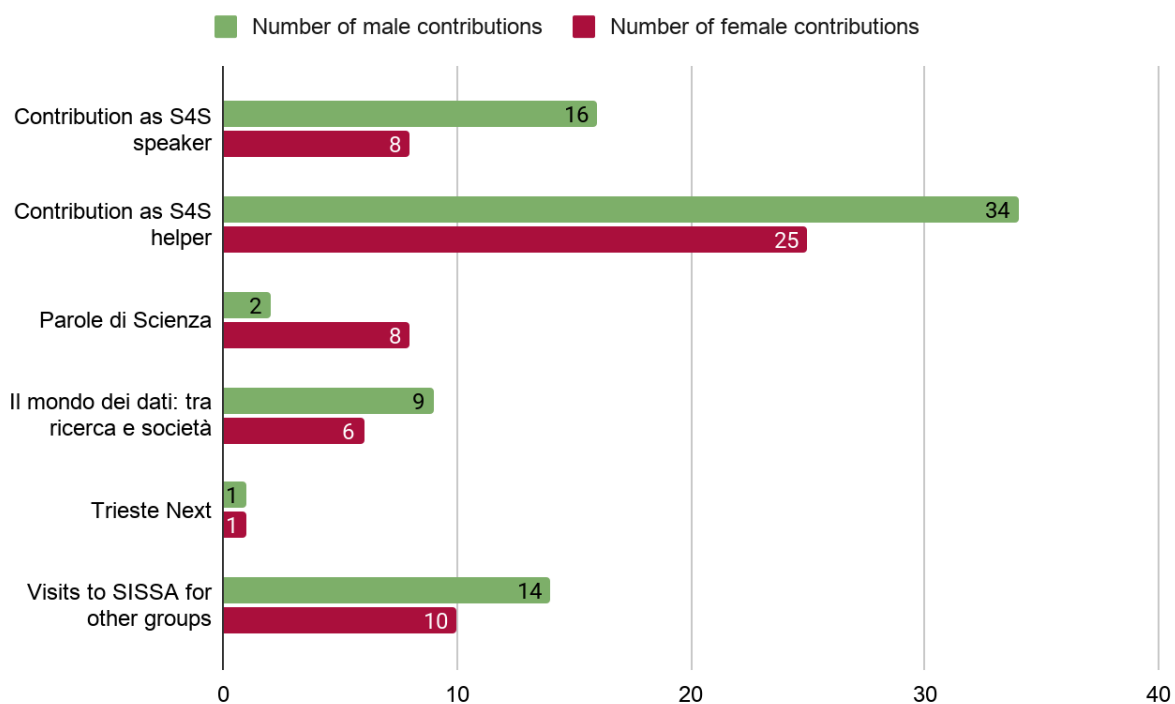


FIGURE 9: Male and female contributions in S4S and its spin-off during the 2025-26 school year. The first category, "Contribution as S4S speaker", presents the same data **already reported** in Figure 8 and Table 3; the lower proportion of women therefore refers to the same result discussed in the previous section.

5. Conclusions

S4S 2025-26 confirmed the success of previous years. The format of activities as well as organization features were very appreciated and the impact on participants, both pupils and volunteers, was explicitly mentioned as meaningful and memorable.

Both teachers and volunteers frequently highlighted the lasting value of the experience and some teachers also reported that the visit had sparked further activities and discussions in the classroom, extending its impact beyond the time spent at SISSA.

The success of S4S is due to many factors. First, to the consistency and strength of the message, and to the clear objectives that have been pursued since the beginning. Furthermore, the professionals who run the program have developed highly specialized skills in science communication and in the design, management, and implementation of the program as a whole, giving a significant added value. Finally, the relationship of trust that has been built up over the years, both with internal volunteers and with teachers and educators. This trust is at the heart of not only the weekly visits program but also all the spin-off initiatives of the SISSA for Schools program.

The collaboration with SISSA researchers and personnel remains the greatest strength of the program. We consider it very important that the volunteers, by integrating S4S activities, feel part of a community. It happens, for example, that volunteers who come more frequently also support, when necessary, the organizational part with sudden replacements or by offering to sustain individual children in case of specific needs. One example of this commitment was the availability of the SISSA community to participate as translators/cultural mediators in the presence of children who had recently arrived in Italy and were not yet able to communicate in Italian. In all of these cases, we were able to find someone in SISSA who spoke their language and who spent some time translating for the child or, if he/she also did not know Italian, simply chatting, making him/her feel welcome and telling their story and experience. This community feeling is very important to us also because it reflects on the well-being of individual researchers, who feel part of a larger context and on which they can rely in case of need for advice and support.

The support and commitment of the whole SISSA management and administrative department is also crucial to the success of the program and has never been refused.

Focusing on participation numbers during this school year, the number of volunteers involved in S4S and its spin-off increased, together with the amount of training and other opportunities offered, further strengthening this collaboration and the quality of their contribution to the program.

The overall number of visitors was comparable to the previous year and, in fact, slightly higher, even though Student Day, a major biennial event, was not scheduled for 2025-26. This was made possible by the introduction of new projects, such as the workshops developed for *Scienza e*

Virgola, and by the expansion of the visits program to include more university students and other interested groups, such as groups from German Italian Physics Exchange (GIPE), Associazione Volontariato Opicina and Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU).

Appendixes

Appendix 1. SISSA for Schools calendar 2025-2026

Thursday's visits - calendar

Date	School name	City	Type of school	Class	Pupils + teachers	Title of the activity and speaker
October 2025						
16	IC Divisione Julia - Divisione Julia	Trieste	Junior high school	3F	23	<i>Esploratori di superfici: come la matematica disegna il mondo</i> - Simone Vincini
23	IC Valmaura - Rodari	Trieste	Primary school	5H	22	<i>Didone e la soluzione matematica</i> - Dario Sterzi, Luca Nalon
November 2025						
6	IC Giovanni Lucio - E. De Amicis	Muggia (TS)	Primary school	5C	20	<i>La vita in una goccia d'acqua</i> - Régis Turuban
13	ITS Deledda - Fabiani	Trieste	High school	4AS	22	<i>Collective phenomena: matter is more than the sum of its parts</i> - Erik Linnér
20	IC Ai Campi Elisi - Stock	Trieste	Junior high school	3	21	<i>Chiedilo a ChatGPT: guida all'uso dell'IA</i> - Fabiola Ricci
27	IC Roiano Gretta Hack - Saba	Trieste	Primary school	4B	21	<i>Se lo vedo (non) ci credo</i> - Claudia Ruzza
December 2025						
1	Conv. Naz. Paolo Diacono - Liceo scientifico	Cividale del Friuli	High school	5A LS	21	<i>Collective phenomena: matter is more than the sum of its parts</i> - Erik Linnér
11	Liceo Brandolini Rota	Oderzo	High school	5	30	<i>Simulations of the Universe: cooking in cosmology</i> - Mak Pavicevic
January 2026						
15	IC San Giovanni - SSIG Codermatz	Trieste	Junior high school	3B	20	<i>Una chimica al centro della terra</i> - Francesca Menescardi
22	IC San Giovanni - SSIG Codermatz	Trieste	Junior high school	3C	21	<i>Come vola un aereo</i> - Alessandro Vici
29	IC Roiano Gretta Hack - Tarabochia	Trieste	Primary school	5	19	<i>Fisica straordinaria in materiali ordinari</i> - Adriano Amaricci
February 2026						
5	ISIS Carducci Dante - Liceo Classico	Trieste	High school	4B	19	<i>Girare per il verso giusto: la matematica dietro le eliche</i> - Anna Ivagnes

12	IC Divisione Julia - Divisione Julia	Trieste	Junior high school	1D	26	<i>Come vola un aereo</i> - Alessandro Vici
26	Montessori San Giusto	Trieste	Primary school	5	27	<i>Fisica straordinaria in materiali ordinari</i> - Adriano Amaricci
March 2026						
5	Liceo Scientifico Sacro Cuore	Modena	High school	5A	26	<i>Intelligenze umane e digitali in astrofisica e cosmologia</i> - Carlo Baccigalupi
12	International School of Trieste	Trieste	Primary school	3	29	<i>La vita in una goccia d'acqua</i> - Régis Turuban
19	IC Verni Della Torre - Collodi	Fogliano	Primary school	3	21	<i>Se lo vedo (non) ci credo</i> - Claudia Ruzza
26	IC Roli - Fratelli Visintini	Trieste	Primary school	4A + 4B	37	<i>Se lo vedo (non) ci credo</i> - Claudia Ruzza
April 2026						
9	IC Vicenza - G. G. Trissino	Vicenza	Junior high school	3E	27	<i>L'hotel degli elettroni</i> - Luca Paradiso
23	IC Italo Svevo	Trieste	Junior high school	2C	14	<i>Una chimica al centro della terra</i> - Francesca Menescardi
May 2026						
14	Liceo Scientifico Niccolò Copernico	Udine	High school	4	24	<i>Come nascono i farmaci del futuro</i> - Angela Parise
21	IC Svevo Lovisato	Trieste	Primary school	4	23	<i>Didone e la soluzione matematica</i> - Luca Nalon
28	IC Roiano Gretta Hack - Saba	Trieste	Primary school	3C	25	<i>Cosa abbiamo in testa</i> - Marco Zanon

Appendix 2. Evaluation questionnaires

All responses to the open-ended questions reported in this section are presented in random order.

Evaluation questionnaire for teachers

Two slightly different questionnaires were provided: the one for teachers who observed and evaluated the discussion game during the visit included additional questions (listed below).

Dear teacher,

Thank you for participating in SISSA for Schools. We ask you just a few minutes of your time. We would like to know what you think about this activity. There is also a space for comments and suggestions that you can use to add something more personal, if desired. Thank you for your availability.

- 1. On which date did the activity take place?**
- 2. Name of your school**
- 3. School grade**
 - Primary school
 - Junior high school
 - High school
- 4. What were your objectives in including this visit in the school program?**
- 5. Did the visit meet your expectations? Rate from 1 (at all) to 4 (completely) the relevance of the visit for your objectives.**
- 6. Rate from 1 (very bad) to 4 (very good) the following aspects:**
 - Interest
 - Enjoyment
 - Appropriateness to the age and knowledge of the students
 - Skill and charisma of the speakers
 - Interactivity
 - Organization of the activity
- 7. What was the best element?**
- 8. What was the worst element?**
- 9. Would you involve other classes in this program?** [Yes / No / It depends]
- 10. Do you think that your students could also take part in visits in English?** [Yes / No]
- 11. Suggestion and comments.**

[Additional questions for teachers who observed and evaluated the discussion game during the visit]

- 12. If you noticed that someone was left out, why was that, based on your experience? Is this something you've noticed on other occasions?**
- 13. Based on your experience with the class, how would you describe their motivation and interest?**
- 14. Describe the dynamics of cooperation within the group, with respect to your experience with them (different alliances, conflicts, etc.).**
- 15. Do you have any suggestions or comments about this experience? Is there anything you would have done differently?**

Thank you!
The SISSA for Schools team

Teachers' open answers

Answers are reported in the original Italian to preserve their meaning and avoid distortion through translation.

4. What were your objectives in including this visit in the school program?

- Far conoscere la SISSA e il mondo della ricerca ai miei studenti.
- Mostrare le possibilità che ci sono a livello post-universitario; orientamento; cura dell'eccellenza; uscire dal seminato e mostrare qualcosa che va oltre.
- Far conoscere e/o approfondire la conoscenza degli alunni.
- La trasversalità tra le diverse discipline
- Orientamento e approfondimento sulla ricerca scientifica.
- Avvicinare i ragazzi al mondo della ricerca scientifica.
- Offrire una motivazione del perché si affrontano alcune materie a scuola (matematica, scienze...) che a volte sembrano difficili. Dare uno sguardo alle possibilità future.
- Orientamento discipline STEM.
- Scoperta del territorio; avvicinamento alle scienze.
- Conoscere le realtà del territorio; collegare le attività agli argomenti studiati in scienze.
- Conoscenza delle realtà scientifiche presenti sul territorio.
- Aprire l'orizzonte post universitario agli studenti di quinta liceo.
- Poter far vedere agli allievi un ambito reale in cui si fa ricerca scientifica.
- Orientamento sapere cos'è la SISSA.
- Orientare gli studenti, far loro conoscere dei professionisti e degli ambienti che comunemente non incontrano per poter prendere consapevolezza delle realtà locali, delle possibilità di formazione per il futuro.
- Avvicinare gli studenti al mondo della ricerca scientifica.
- *Empty box [1 time]*

7. What was the best element?

- L'attività su Didone che hanno svolto i bambini dopo la spiegazione dei ricercatori.
- Buona organizzazione dei tempi delle relazioni.
- Attività scatole misteriose.
- La simpatia e la competenza delle dottoresse relatrici.
- Il dialogo che i ragazzi hanno potuto avere con i dottorandi durante la visita alla scuola.
- L'interattività.
- Gli incontri che gli studenti hanno fatto con i ricercatori.
- capacità di spiegare temi estremamente complessi a bambini di 11 anni generando in loro curiosità.
- L'organizzazione accurata e il modo in cui i volontari si relazionavano ai bambini.
- Tematica attuale e attività a piccoli gruppi per studenti che si sono sentiti liberi di chiedere.
- Il linguaggio utilizzato, lo spazio dedicato al dialogo, la professionalità.
- La spiegazione del funzionamento del cervello.
- La disponibilità delle persone e la possibilità di interagire con i ricercatori.
- La capacità che i relatori hanno avuto nel coinvolgere i ragazzi.
- L'argomento del talk.
- Ho apprezzato il dialogo con gli studenti, il loro coinvolgimento nonostante le difficoltà a intervenire da parte loro, il linguaggio adatto all'età, gli argomenti trattati.
- *Empty box [1 time]*

8. What was the worst element?

- La non disponibilità a dedicare uno spazio per poter consumare velocemente il pranzo al sacco.
- I ragazzi non hanno interagito molto durante il seminario. Magari si poteva pensare ad alcune modalità per stimolare la loro partecipazione attiva, perché in autonomia faticano a far domande.
- Per tentare di far interagire di più gli studenti durante la discussione nella seconda parte forse si potrebbe pensare a renderla un gioco a squadre o qualcosa di simile in modo che anche i più timidi possano interagire senza sentirsi gli occhi addosso.
- Non poter visitare i laboratori. L'impossibilità di vedere laboratori.
- Niente, tutto bene organizzato e calato sui ragazzi. Forse l'orario non è l'ottimale ma siamo a conoscenza che sono attività pensate per il mattino.
- Il livello delle relazioni era a volte un po' basso vista la preparazione dei miei studenti.
- Niente [2 times]
- Forse l'intervallo poteva essere più lungo
- Forse il poco tempo a disposizione.
- Mi sarebbe piaciuto qualcosa di più pratico.
- La stanza delle conferenze era molto calda. L'attività di movimento prevista nella prima parte della giornata non era adatta allo spazio in cui si svolgeva. Lo spazio era ristretto e i bambini rischiavano di farsi male.
- Empty box [3 times]

11. Suggestion and comments.

- Grazie è stata una bellissima giornata per studenti e insegnanti!
- Complimenti per l'organizzazione e grazie
- Sarebbe opportuno riuscire a calibrare gli interventi dei relatori meglio, in modo che si adattino meglio al livello di preparazione degli studenti per non risultare troppo semplici.
- Organizzare attività laboratoriali sarebbe molto utile per gli studenti di scuola superiore, che spesso accedono raramente a dei laboratori.
- Sarebbe bello poter organizzare nella stessa giornata più laboratori a rotazione che coinvolgano più discipline.
- Ci auguriamo di poter partecipare nuovamente alle attività proposte.
- Grazie per l'importante occasione che offrite agli studenti.
- Molto interessante la possibilità data agli allievi di poter stare con i ricercatori, migliorerebbe se avessero più possibilità di vedere quello che fanno realmente.
- Bravi continuate a formarvi e a coinvolgere le scuole.
- Accogliere anche l'altra quinta della scuola Tarabochia.
- Un ringraziamento per il continuo lavoro che fate e per la possibilità che date alle scuole
- Complimenti!
- Empty box [5 times]

Teachers' open answers specific to the discussion game (intended only for teachers of classes that have attended the discussion game)

12. If you noticed that someone was left out, why was that, based on your experience? Is this something you've noticed on other occasions?

- Si studenti poco inclini a parlare in pubblico.
- Qualcuno non si è espresso per timidezza e per paura di essere criticato dai compagni (immagino).
- Nessuno in particolare.
- Durante l'attività hanno partecipato attivamente gli studenti che anche in classe di solito partecipano al dialogo educativo. Gli altri un pò per vergogna e paura di mettersi in gioco davanti ai compagni hanno preferito rimanere in silenzio.

13. Based on your experience with the class, how would you describe their motivation and interest?

- Alto [2 times]
- Molto buono.
- L'interesse è stato evidente e anche al rientro in classe gli studenti hanno espresso parere positivo sull'esperienza.

14. Describe the dynamics of cooperation within the group, with respect to your experience with them (different alliances, conflicts, etc.).

- Clima sereno e di collaborazione.
- La classe si è comportata più o meno come a scuola, in modo piuttosto corretto. Devo dire che ho avuto il piacere di sentire interventi anche di studenti che solitamente parlano un po' meno o non intervengono.
- Alte.
- Si è verificato quello che di solito avviene anche in classe, con pochi studenti che riescono ad interagire ed argomentare le proprie idee.

15. Do you have any suggestions or comments about this experience? Is there anything you would have done differently?

- Come dicevo nella parte precedente, proprio per coinvolgere maggiormente gli studenti più timorosi, si potrebbe pensare a rendere questa parte più giocosa, magari a squadre. Ma resto aperta a proposte!
- Forse un tempo maggiore a disposizione per l'attività.
- Più testimonianze di esperienze individuali sul percorso didattico dei relatori.
- Empty box [1 time]

Teachers' observation grid for the discussion game

The observation grid used for the discussion game is the following. We do not include in the present report the complete answers, only high-level considerations are given in [3.1 Evaluation by the teachers](#).

School and class: _____	
No. of students: _____	Time dedicated to the DG: _____
Place an X <u>each</u> time a <u>new</u> participant:	
expresses and supports their opinion	
agrees with others	
disagrees with others	
makes a connection with personal experiences	
asks others for clarification	
interrupts or talks over someone during the conversation	
gives the floor to others	
Place an X <u>each</u> time:	
a disagreement causes tension	
no one speaks, there is a prolonged silence	
someone takes an initiative they do not usually take (e.g. leading the group or proposing solutions)	
a student who usually participates very little speaks up	
there are positive signals towards a student or a situation (e.g. appreciation, smiles, encouragement)	
there are negative signals towards a student or a situation (e.g. giggling, looks, belittling comments)	
Towards the end of the activity, place an X next to the most appropriate answer:	
actively participated in the discussion:	All Many About half Fewer than half Very few
showed interest in the discussion:	All Many About half Fewer than half Very few

Evaluation questionnaire for high school pupils

Dear pupil,

Thank you for participating in SISSA for Schools. We ask you for a few minutes of your time. In fact, we would like to know what you think of the activity. There is also a space for comments and suggestions that you can use to add something more personal if you wish.
Thank you for your time.

- 1. Name of your school**
- 2. Name of the researcher who gave the seminar**
- 3. Concerning the seminar by the researcher, on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 10 (very much), how much do you agree with these statements?**
 - The activity was interesting
 - I learned new things
 - I felt like going deeper into scientific topics
 - I appreciated the sympathy and skill of the researcher
- 4. Concerning the tour of SISSA with a researcher, on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 10 (very much), how much do you agree with these statements?**
 - The activity was interesting
 - I learned new things
 - I felt like going deeper into scientific topics
 - I appreciated the sympathy and skill of the researcher
- 5. What was your favorite thing about the day?**
- 6. What was your least favorite thing about the day?**
- 7. Overall, how much did you enjoy the entire morning on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 10 (very much)?**
- 8. Would you like to repeat this experience with other researchers?** [Yes / No / It depends]
- 9. Would you feel up to participating in activities in English?** [Yes / No]
- 10. Suggestion and comments.**

Thank you!

The SISSA for Schools team

High school pupils' open answers

Answers are reported in the original Italian to preserve their meaning and avoid distortion through translation.

5. What was your favorite thing about the day?

- Il seminario di Erik [4 times]
- Tutto [2 times]
- La pausa pranzo
- Il tour della SISSA [24 times]
- Visitare la SISSA [2 times]
- I giochi in giardino [2 times]
- Il tour e la conversazione con la ricercatrice
- Vedere la struttura
- Poter chiedere molte domande e avere delle risposte puntuali e precise
- Scoprire le esperienze dei ricercatori

- La sala studio [2 times]
- Il ping pong
- La presentazione iniziale
- Il tour della SISSA fatto dalla ricercatrice di astrofisica [2 times]
- Parlare con i ricercatori
- L'ambiente accogliente e familiare che si respira alla SISSA
- La biblioteca [5 times]
- La libreria e i libri sui dinosauri
- Il giro con la ragazza Indiana (non so il nome ma è molto brava)
- Il parco / giardino [2 times]
- La presentazione di Mak [4 times]
- La presentazione sulla cosmologia con il paragone con il cibo
- Rapporto galassia-pizza
- Il tour della struttura e il modo in cui si lega al paesaggio circostante
- La disponibilità della ricercatrice [2 times]
- Capire cosa studiava il nostro accompagnatore [2 times]
- Parlare con Aiswarya è stato molto interessante ed lei è stata molto carina e disponibile
- Quando ci è stato fatto il tour dell'edificio perché la ragazza che ci ha guidato ci ha parlato di argomenti molto interessanti
- La chiacchierata con la ricercatrice che ci ha guidato nel tour della SISSA
- La chiacchierata con Aiswarya
- Il giro fatto con ricercatore
- Fare il tour con il tutor Walter
- La risposta alle nostre domande
- L'ufficio di Walter e la spiegazione su come affrontare una ricerca
- Il tour della SISSA e approfondire questioni scientifiche che prima non conoscevo
- Giocare a ping pong con Bruno
- La presentazione di Anna
- Il tour della Sissa con Purvaash
- La prima parte, molto interessante anche il meeting con il ricercatore che ci ha fatto assaggiare un international environment
- La spiegazione della materia di studio del nostro accompagnatore
- L'atmosfera che si percepisce all'interno della struttura
- La cosa che mi è piaciuta di più del seminario è sicuramente la disponibilità e la tranquillità del ricercatore nel parlare del suo lavoro e la quantità di informazioni e curiosità che ci ha dato
- Il tour di SISSA, vedere l'ufficio della ricercatrice capire su cosa si basava la sua ricerca
- Visitare un nuovo ambiente facendo un tour e relazionarmi con il mio relatore
- Erik che ci ha spiegato cosa fanno alla SISSA
- Il tour della SISSA e la conversazione con la guida
- Il seminario di Angela [3 times]
- La scuola come struttura e la mensa [2 times]
- È tutto un nuovo mondo, diverso dall'Università e dalle superiori
- La varietà di persone con cui abbiamo parlato
- Ho conosciuto un approccio completamente nuovo alla conoscenza e all'apprendimento
- Ambiente e esperienza nuove
- È stato molto utile capire come si può lavorare nell'ambito della ricerca
- Potersi immedesimare nella vita dei ricercatori e avere una visione più realistica della loro vita e dei loro sogni
- Il poter parlare con varie persone che lavorano nei vari ambiti
- Ascoltare la vita dei ricercatori, conoscere il loro percorso e le difficoltà
- Scoprire il percorso e le esperienze che hanno avuto molto persone di quest'ambiente e le loro opinioni su questo tipo di vita
- L'incontro con due ricercatori, uno proveniente dal Brasile, e uno dalla Repubblica Ceca
- Le spiegazioni date e l'interattività che c'è stata con il ricercatore, ci ha dato molti consigli utili
- Tour e chiedere al ricercatore la sua esperienza

- Gli approfondimenti sull'universo
- *Empty box [9 times]*

6. What was your least favorite thing about the day?

- Il meteo [2 times]
- Deprimermi alla complessità dei calcoli fisici nella lounge
- Niente / nulla [21 times]
- Non so [2 times]
- Il discorso 😞 mi sono addormentata per un momento però è stato interessante
- Non capire l'inglese
- Mi è piaciuto tutto
- Mi è piaciuto tutto tanto
- Nulla, tutto interessantissimo
- Il tour
- Il tour molto lento
- Niente, tutto bello
- Nulla, tutto bellissimo
- Vedere numeri e simboli strani sulle lavagne
- Le palline rotte del ping pong [2 times]
- Alcune illusioni ottiche fuori erano rotte
- Non saprei
- Forse la prima parte (quella prima del tour) è stata un po' più pesante
- L'odore nell'aula
- Nulla tutto molto interessante
- Non aver visto i laboratori [7 times]
- La presentazione / il seminario [7 times]
- La parte iniziale
- La spiegazione delle turbolenze
- Il poco tempo a disposizione
- Il discorso di anna sull'ingegneria navale
- La presentazione seppur interessante era un po' complessa da capire
- Il giro in biblioteca
- La mancanza di un programma preciso nell'organizzazione del tour
- L'introduzione su cos'è il dottorato
- Il power point era molto noioso
- Nulla in particolare, forse avere tempi molto scanditi che non ci hanno permesso di approfondire di più con il professore
- Le cose scientifiche
- Ho trovato tutto abbastanza interessante
- Niente in particolare [2 times]
- Mi è piaciuto tutto allo stesso modo
- L'introduzione
- La conferenza sulla scienza
- Il tour, scelta neuroscienze, parlato molto poco quasi nulla di quello [2 times]
- Il fatto che è una vita di sacrifici
- Il lungo viaggio in treno
- Presentazione un po' elementare
- Il fatto che è finito troppo presto
- La pioggia
- Il caldo all'interno di alcune stanze dell'edificio
- Nulla, mi è piaciuto tutto e mi sono divertita, è stato molto interessante
- *Empty box [31 times]*

10. Suggestion and comments.

- Seminari più complessi :)
- Sono stati tutti/e molto bravi/e e simpatici/he
- Non so
- La conferenza dura tanto e la concentrazione è minima quindi tipo fare cose più pratiche per svegliare un po' più gli studenti
- Cambiare le racchette da ping pong [2 times]
- Far vedere i laboratori, anche da fuori tramite una parete trasparente in plexiglas
- Fare più pause
- Trovo che spiegare come funzioni il lavoro di un ricercatore sia intelligente; tuttavia provare a spiegare cosa di preciso tratta un dato ricercatore è troppo ambizioso
- Power Point molto noioso, concetti belli ma tutto lento e poco interattivo
- Renderla più internazionale possibile

- Parlare di più durante il tour, senza aspettare una risposta dai visitatori
- Nel tuo fare cose che possano far partecipare di più ragazzi che sono ancora al liceo
- No
- Fare vedere anche qualche laboratorio [2 times]
- Sarebbe interessante poter vedere anche dei laboratori di ricerca
- Visita dei laboratori
- Ottimo il fatto di fare delle visite in inglese
- Sarebbe carino vedere qualche esperimento
- Fare dei laboratori o almeno poterli vedere sarebbe un ottimo modo per invogliare i ragazzi [2 times]
- Permettere più libertà ai ragazzi di svolgere attività che interessano a loro e non organizzare un giro già predefinito
- Empty box [91 times]

Evaluation questionnaire for volunteers

Answers are reported in the original language used to preserve their meaning and avoid distortion through translation.

Please, take a few minutes to let us know what worked and what didn't during this year of SISSA for Schools. This evaluation form regards Thursday morning activities, and not other parallel programs e.g. Student Day/Orientation program.

1. Which was/were your role/s in the 2025-26 edition of S4S?

- Speaker in a seminar/activity during one or more Thursday visits
- Helper in the escape game with primary school pupils
- Helper in small group visits with high school students
- Interpreter
- Other

2. Based on your personal experience, what is the best aspect of the S4S program?

3. Based on your personal experience, what is the worst aspect of the S4S program?

4. Is there something that you learned from this experience?

5. In your opinion, what did the children/teenagers took home from their visit?

6. What do you think about the frequency of our email communication?

- It's the right amount
- It's too many emails
- I'd like to receive more updates

7. Are you interested in taking part in science communication workshops? [Yes / No / Maybe]

8. Which elements would you like to find in a free training workshop linked to SISSA for Schools?

- Practical exercises focused on your participation in SISSA for Schools
- Basics of science communication
- How media (newspaper, tv, radio, social, etc.) work
- How to interact with media (press releases, interviews, etc.)
- What we know about the public perception of science and technology
- Inclusion practices in science communication
- Other

9. How would you prefer the training to be provided? [In person / Online]

10. How would you like the training to be structured?

- Independent 4-hour modules (current structure)
- More frequent but shorter sessions (1.5 hours)
- Intensive workshop: a couple of days in the same week
- Other

11. When would you prefer the training to be scheduled?

- From Monday to Friday, in the morning
- From Monday to Thursday, in the afternoon
- On Friday afternoon
- Other

12. Last year we introduced office hours for volunteers. Did you use the service?

- Yes
- No

13. If not, why?

- Because I didn't have time
- Because I didn't feel the need
- Because the office hours didn't fit with my schedule
- Because I didn't know about the office hours
- Other

14. Please share any additional comments or suggestions that could help us plan next year's SISSA for Schools program and its related training activities.

Thank you!

The SISSA for Schools team

Volunteers' open answers

2. Based on your personal experience, what is the best aspect of the S4S program?

- It created a very relaxed environment where volunteers could connect with the school students, they could ask whichever questions they'd like, and see the building without feeling supervised. It gave a great demonstration of what it is like to study at SISSA
- It makes a valuable connection between kids and research and helps students understand science can be fun and not only difficult
- One of my aims is showing up to younger people, to let them see that scientific research is an option in life
- The S4S promotes the formation of a community of scientists, virtually at any
- The opportunity to reconnect with the general public rather than interacting only with experts, as we usually do at conferences, and to find creative ways to explain complex scientific concepts.
- La possibilità di mettere in pratica le proprie competenze in ambito comunicativo, subito sul campo
- Interacting with kids and having the opportunity to share science with people not working on the field (hence translating complicated aspects in an easy way)
- Interest of students, chatting with other people, nice SISSA4Schools staff

level, with the aim of transmitting the passion or the interest for science, not just to the kids from schools but also among the same persons participating in this project. This is the key and best part; it is a stimulating bidirectional learning process , useful for anyone at both sides of the table.

- The fact that very young students get to know about research (research topics, but also the possibility to become a researcher)
- Getting the minds of young people excited about science
- The interaction of visiting students and teachers with SISSA students and researchers, always seeing each other as equals
- Making children discover the research environment
- Interaction with new generations and promotion of scientific research
- I momenti di interazione tra noi e i ragazzi, soprattutto quelli grandi del liceo
- Sharing our passion for science with future generations!
- Interacting with young kids

3. Based on your personal experience, what is the worst aspect of the S4S program?

- Same as aboveahaha! Jokes aside, I found no bad aspects in my S4S experience.
- I can be repetitive for volunteers
- Forse il poco tempo che si ha a disposizione coi ragazzi più grandi. un'oretta con 5 o 6 persone potrebbe essere poco, ma parlo avendo poca esperienza per ora
- The worst aspect is to recognize how few senior scientists get part of this project. Those who have the widest and deepest view on science are not there to convey their passion to new generations, or at least try it.
- Not really strong feelings on bad aspects, maybe as a first time volunteer I would have appreciated a bit more preparation on suggestions on interactions with students, especially high school ones
- I have not identified any significant drawbacks so far. However, I have participated only once, so I may need more experience to notice more subtle aspects that could be improved.
- Il tempo richiesto per preparare un talk
- Being reached only from local schools
- Some of the students weren't interested in maths and therefore didn't have any questions to ask/didn't seem very interested in the experience.
- I found it difficult to grab the attention of high school students
- Not the worst but sometimes I don't get picked as a volunteer while others get hogged 😞
- None [5 times]

4. Is there something that you learned from this experience?

- Talking to kids and people outside academia about science made me find the motivation back to do science, which sometimes I lose among deadlines and boring and stressful sides of research.
- Kids are very curious and teenagers are more future-oriented than I believed
- Working with children is always very rewarding. I improved my ability to manage a
- I learned that adapting scientific communication to different audiences is both challenging and rewarding, and that creativity can play an important role in making science accessible.
- Come rendere dei concetti scientifici sempre più facili da interpretare, attraverso metafore ed il gioco
- Structuring talks
- To explain my work to young people

group of 8-10 year old children and guide them through solving problems

- Transmitting passion makes me feel full
- I learned many things that are hard to summarize in a line. To listen more. That what I say sometimes is not what others get. That the voice, body, gestures and other things are all part of the science communication process.
- I have surely improved and reflected on my ability to communicate with students of different ages.
- To talk about science in simple words
- che i bambini sono veramente pieni di energia, non me ne aspettavo così tanta!
- Yes, how to effectively communicate your research with general public
- Yes, how to connect with students of a different age with whom I don't share the same first language.
- Explaining complex ideas using the terminology understandable by children.
- Yes, how to efficiently communicate science with people not in the field.

5. In your opinion, what did the children/teenagers took home from their visit?

- How working with science works and that it can be fun even if difficult.
- Hopefully, a sparkle for science
- They now know that we are people like others and they can choose to also do this if they want
- I think it showed them what research and academic mathematic study is really like, which they probably haven't seen before. And that it is an accessible career option for them.
- I hope they took home two things: i) be curious and never stop posing questions; ii) everyone can be a scientist. Everyone.
- Children can learn something while having fun, teenagers took home that there is the possibility to become a researcher
- Besides curiosity about science, I believe the students gained a more realistic understanding of what an academic career looks like, the educational journey behind it, and the collaborative nature of scientific research.
- Knowing that there is this kind of research at SISSA, some interest in research topics
- "I want to be a researcher as well" <3
- That people study and do research after university, maybe for the whole life
- Sicuramente per alcuni bambini è stata un'esperienza divertente e questo può essere sufficiente. I più grandi forse si sono resi conto che, anche se siamo un po' più vecchi di loro, non siamo poi tanto diversi: siamo tutti comunque ragazzi che inseguono le proprie passioni e ambizioni
- The teenagers definitely understood more about what research is and how the life of a researcher is like. A lot of them that I interacted with did not know what PhD or postdoc meant, so it was really exciting for them.
- Especially the younger ones were very fascinated by the environment and the myth of scientists
- Perhaps it helped them to decide what they want to be when they grow up, to some extent.
- The one thing that the children for sure took from this visit is the fact that scientists are just normal people with normal lives, and that anyone can do science if they want to!
- Vedere la scienza come qualcosa di vicino a loro e non qualcosa di proibitivo da capire

14. Please share any additional comments or suggestions that could help us plan next year's SISSA for Schools program and its related training activities.

- I think that the tour with high school students should be a little bit more structured. We may think of some activities or questions we can try to attack during that hour. When I was there they were really shy and got easily distracted. I tried asking them questions (not as interrogation, just to get to know them and their interests), but often nobody answered.
- Looking forward to continuing next year :)
- I thought it was a great experience I am very lucky to have been a part of - thank you Elvira!
- Portare cibo
- *Empty box [12 times]*