leading change

Figure 1 Photocall for our school science ambassadors!

YOUNG 'SCIENCE AMBASSADORS' raise the profile of science

Katie Ridley appointed children as 'science ambassadors' and raised the profile of science across her school

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Types of activity
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The inspiration for 'science ambassadors' came to me after embarking on the Primary Science Quality Mark programme (www.psqm.org.uk). The initial interviews with the children started me thinking about their perception of science. Many claimed that they did not do science very often, but examining written work and displays around the school and talking to other teachers suggested that this was definitely not the case. I realised that science was just not recognised as such by the children. They talked about scientific experiments they had done but did not mention topics they had covered such as 'teeth', 'light and shadows' and 'adaptation'. I knew then that I needed to do something to raise the profile of science across the school. I needed the children to know when science was taking place and to understand that science was not all about making a mess or using a stopwatch!

This seemed a huge undertaking and as I continued on my PSQM journey, it became apparent that this was something not to be done alone. The whole process was about working as a school to raise the profile of science. I had initially worked on getting the teachers to help. We had written our own set of science principles, agreed what a 'good' science lesson looked like and that a scientific investigation would happen within each topic. While all of these things would certainly help, I felt it was also important to involve the children more in the running of science across the school.

Appointing the science ambassadors

I came up with the idea of science ambassadors as I thought that it would create a sought-after role within the school. Children who were selected would receive a clipboard and a white lab coat, complete with school logo and the title 'science ambassador'. The lab coats were to be worn by the children whenever a science lesson was taking place and they were to gather evidence (a science skill!) to be able to report on science activities in the school in termly meetings with me. I knew that all these features would appeal to the children and would give the role of the ambassador a high status across the school (Figure 1).

To introduce the science ambassadors we held a special assembly, all about science and the ways in which science influences our everyday lives. The ambassadors were called to the front to receive their clipboards and white lab coats. Two children from each class, from reception (ages 4–5) to year 6 (ages 10–11), were selected to take on the role. These children were chosen because they had shown an interest in science and were good role models within the class. They immediately felt very special: '*I feel like a real scientist*' said 5-year-old Scarlett.

Initially I was hesitant about dressing the science ambassadors in white lab coats as I felt this was a little too stereotypical. In the interviews the children had already expressed the view that science only happened when they were doing experiments and I did not want to reinforce that belief. However, the presence of the ambassadors in their lab coats has provided a real signal to the class that the lesson they are doing is 'science'. Some children have been quite surprised to learn that areas such as 'teeth', 'plants' and 'habitats' are all 'science' (Figure 2). It seems that they did have a stereotypical view that science was '*doing experiments*'! Now, when I ask, children tell me that they do '*loads of science*'. I don't think that the quantity of science lessons has increased over the year, but the children are more aware when they are involved in a science activity. The ambassadors love wearing their lab coats in the science lesson and feel a great sense of pride and importance as they know that they will have to report back on whatever science activity is taking place.

Figure 2 When are we doing science?

The science ambassadors' role

The science ambassadors wear their lab coats whenever science is taking place. They have a special report card to complete, detailing the lesson and identifying learning that has taken place. The younger children can record by taking photographs and, at our science ambassador meetings, they all discuss what learning is taking place.

It has been lovely to witness the children talking to each other about what they have done and sharing the joy and excitement that good science lessons bring. As a science coordinator, this has given me an invaluable insight into, and understanding of, the science teaching that is taking place across the school. I feel that if a child did not have anything to report to me on a termly basis, then I would be able to speak to the class teacher to find out why this was the case. It hasn't happened yet.

The photographs that the children take have formed a great portfolio of science across the school and this has saved me the termly job of asking teachers for photographs of science, waiting to receive them and then collating them all (usually late one evening!) into a portfolio.

Expanding the role – lab technicians

More recently, I have involved the year 5 and 6 (ages 9–11) ambassadors in the organisation of our science resources. They helped me to sort out and label the science area and have become responsible for assisting teachers in setting up the classroom for science investigations (Figure 3). This additional support has really helped the teachers in their lesson preparation and some have commented that they are doing more science investigations because '*they are easier to set up*', so removing one of the barriers to practical science.

Science week

The science ambassadors were also a great asset during science

Figure 3 Our junior 'lab technicians' have enjoyed their role and proved very helpful

Figure 4 The science ambassadors proudly displaying some of the school's work in Science Week

week. They were consulted about the types of science that they wanted to see being done, the visitors they would like to invite, and where they would like to go. Finally, they were involved in helping me to display all of our work (Figure 4). They wore their lab coats all week and visitors to the school recognised that these were 'special' children and asked them to explain their role. The children loved all this extra attention and were very keen and proud to discuss their role.

The future ...

New ambassadors have been selected for this academic year. It was lovely to see how keen all the children were to be given the role. This gave me the assurance that the role is highly desirable and sought after within the school.

I would like to use the ambassadors to develop the science section of our school website. I am going to use the termly meetings to teach the children how to upload photographs and create web-links. Further to this, I hope to teach the ambassadors to use the school's tablet computers to create videos of specific science topics. My plan is to upload these to the school website and give each video a QR code that can be stuck into children's books so that parents or visitors to the school will be able to watch the children enjoying science lessons.

I am incredibly proud of the science ambassadors and I believe that they have made a very positive contribution to helping me raise the profile of science across our school. I am even more thrilled that it is the children who have made this happen.

Katie Ridley is science coordinator at St Gregory's Catholic Primary School, Liverpool. Email: katie.ridley@yahoo.co.uk