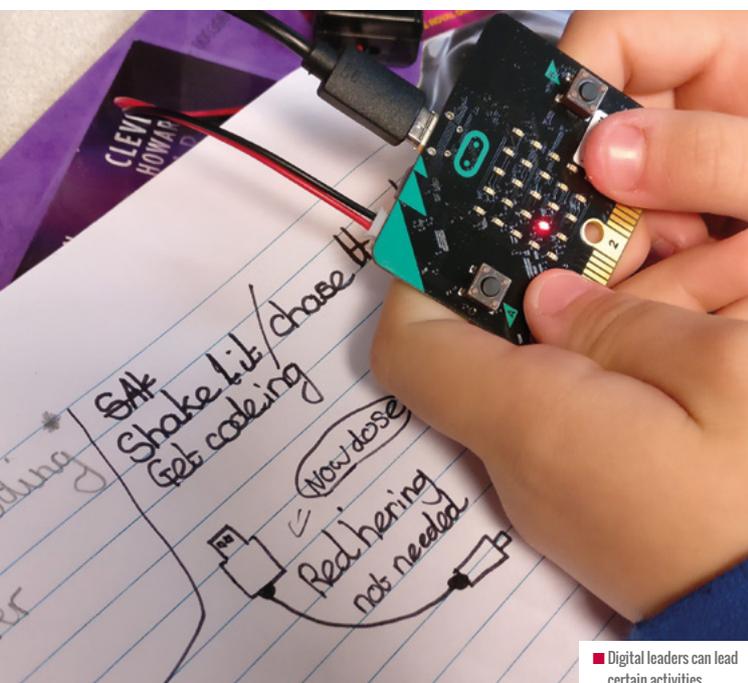


MAKE DIGITAL LEADERS WORK FOR YOU

Having a suitably qualified team of digital leaders in your school can help lighten the workload of computing teachers. In the first part of this guide, **Alan O'Donohoe** of [exa.foundation](#) describes how DLs can reduce some problems teachers encounter – and suggests examples and tips for recruiting, rewarding, and training

Defining precisely what a digital leader does is not easy, since it varies from school to school and by individual. In simple terms, digital leaders are learners who have been assigned additional roles and responsibility to develop and maintain the school's digital resources, content, and environment. This may extend to include providing curriculum support to other users or leading extra-curricular activities such as clubs.

Although there are some commercial DL packages available, those are outside the remit of this guide. Some schools say they've looked into digital leaders but the costs of the commercial schemes are prohibitive. Instead, this guide describes a DIY approach to setting up a programme in your school at zero cost.



■ Digital leaders can lead certain activities.

A DIY digital leaders scheme involves initially recruiting ideal candidates for the role, perhaps through some interview-style tasks, and a training programme that may include some rudimentary maintenance like troubleshooting printers, clearing paper jams, and tidying tasks. As they develop confidence, they may suggest activities they can lead, including clubs. Some schools aim to have at least one DL in every class to provide some teacher assistance when required.

Why do you even need digital leaders?

Before deciding to embark upon any exciting new initiative or programme, it's always prudent to pause and ask: "Why? Why are we doing this? Why do we even need this?" If you have a really compelling answer to the 'why?' question, every challenge or obstacle that follows is surmountable. If you can't easily answer the question, then maybe you don't need DLs, or haven't yet recognised what the advantages are in having them.

In one school I taught at, a pupil named Anthony with an interest in computing had developed a massive amount of knowledge and experience in networking and network security outside of school, through following online courses. It was a constant source of frustration for Anthony that he was placed in a lower set due to his English grades. To compound matters for him, his computing lessons were led by a non-specialist teacher who didn't acknowledge Anthony's interest or expertise; not knowing how to see this as an opportunity, the teacher instead saw Anthony as a persistent nuisance. Out of boredom, Anthony sought to exploit weaknesses in network security and tried to win friends by informing other students how they could circumvent various restrictions in place. This escalated to a point where Anthony and his group of 'hackers' faced permanent exclusion from the school.

There is a happy ending to this tale, since Anthony eventually realised that he could earn more respect by working alongside the network administration team in the school, by advising them of



■ When everything goes to plan, digital leaders can be a huge help in school.

potential loopholes. Taking it further, a junior technician had an interest in Linux servers and together with Anthony they were able to offer lunchtime activities to others on a sandbox network. Anthony later went on to further study in computer science, and I hope that he is now enjoying a successful career as a cyber security consultant.

While we would hope that Anthony's story is more the exception than the norm, I regularly hear tales of schools suffering DDoS attacks orchestrated intentionally by their own students seeking revenge or just to see what happens when they do. Having a digital leaders programme won't guarantee your school immunity from a DDoS, but it will go a long way towards providing a more positive outlet for those students who might be tempted otherwise.

When you are too busy

If you're reading this article thinking "it sounds marvellous to have digital leaders, but the reality is we're just too busy," you may very well be right. Sometimes in life, people find themselves too busy to fix that leak that later develops into a flood, or too busy to refuel the tank of the car that eventually runs out of fuel on the motorway. Even if you start with some small steps, you've already started on the journey towards making your teaching workload a little more manageable.

Maybe establishing a digital leader programme appears to be a luxury you can't afford, but by recruiting the best candidates as DLs and having in place a programme of training and activities for them, it has real potential to make life easier for you and your colleagues in your school, reducing workload and providing additional learning experiences. Besides, who says the computing teacher has to be the one to lead the programme? It might be led by a network manager or technician under guidance from a teacher.



■ Can digital leaders help with a heavy workload?



ALAN O'DONOHOE

Alan (@teknoteacher) has more than 20 years' experience teaching and leading technology, ICT, and computing in schools in England. He runs **exa.foundation**, delivering professional development to engage digital makers, supporting the teaching of computing, and promoting the appropriate use of technology.





■ Can young learners help other young learners?

➤ I started this guide by explaining that the concept of ‘digital leaders’ means different things to different people. In some primary schools, digital leaders are managed by classroom assistants; in some secondary schools, they work very closely with the school’s network team. Opinions are mixed, so your mileage may vary. Some teachers say they have made a massive impact in their schools, particularly in terms of supporting other teachers. However, there are some teachers who say that despite trying a few times it just hasn’t worked for them.

There have been instances where having DLs has not worked well – this could be down to selecting unsuitable candidates, the wrong year group, or not being clear enough in your expectations of them. A few thoughts and ideas, then.

Recruitment and retention

Get DLs to assist with interviewing, appointing, and training the next generation of DLs.

Daily DL activities

- Make sure they can use hardware such as interactive whiteboards, BeeBots and visualisers. Make sure they are competent in the main software used in school. Provide them with training in new technology as it comes into the school.
- Keep technology spaces clean, tidy and serviced. Report broken or malfunctioning equipment.
- Offer homework help or help out at a lunch club.
- Write instructions for different pieces of software or apps.

Rewards and recognition

Some teachers have organised reward trips specifically for their DLs. Martin Bailey planned a trip to Bett Show; Lara Lowe organised a DL trip to Raspberry Pi HQ in Cambridge; and Julie Shaw recommends taking them to an Apple store if they have one near you – they do great workshops for free (she has taken her digital leaders to the Apple Store in Liverpool).

Some case studies

- Anne Marggraf-Turley’s Repair Café – a group of students run a Friday lunchtime helpdesk facility, where staff and students can bring in devices from home that need repairs.
- Lara Lowe’s DLs established a Raspberry Pi club called ‘Mary Mags Pi Club’. They maintained a blog charting their progress and adventures, and organised a huge Saturday festival at their school called ‘Makersphere’.

“ SOME TEACHERS SAY DIGITAL LEADERS HAVE MADE A MASSIVE IMPACT IN THEIR SCHOOLS

Suggestions from computing teachers

Nikie Arthurs: A really good use of digital leaders in school involved them helping to create interactive wall and corridor displays, and involving them too at open evenings and GCSE option talks. They loved helping to set up the digital challenge competitions and prizes, and also working on changing the homework policy to be more fun. My personal favourite was working with the University of the Third Age; we travelled to a CLC once a week and led community project work. It was really great seeing old people’s opinions changing of the local teenagers when they were helping them set up Skype and internet shopping.

Steve Hewlett: Use DLs as content managers for school websites.

Teresa Boag: Get DLs to write ‘how to’ support guides for younger learners.

Sway Grantham: DLs can check/repair resources, compare software, create WAGOLL (What A Good One Looks Like), lead assemblies, offer tech support in lessons, train staff, and lead clubs.

Vikki Hawkins: Our DLs are brilliant. They learn how to use apps so they can support in class, make resources, lead online safety assemblies, provide technical support, help with the physical bits of new iPads (unboxing, labelling, putting cases on), and create the school news. It's been a very popular initiative with other staff.

Jessica Rose: Our DLs take photos in assemblies to share on social media and school newsletter

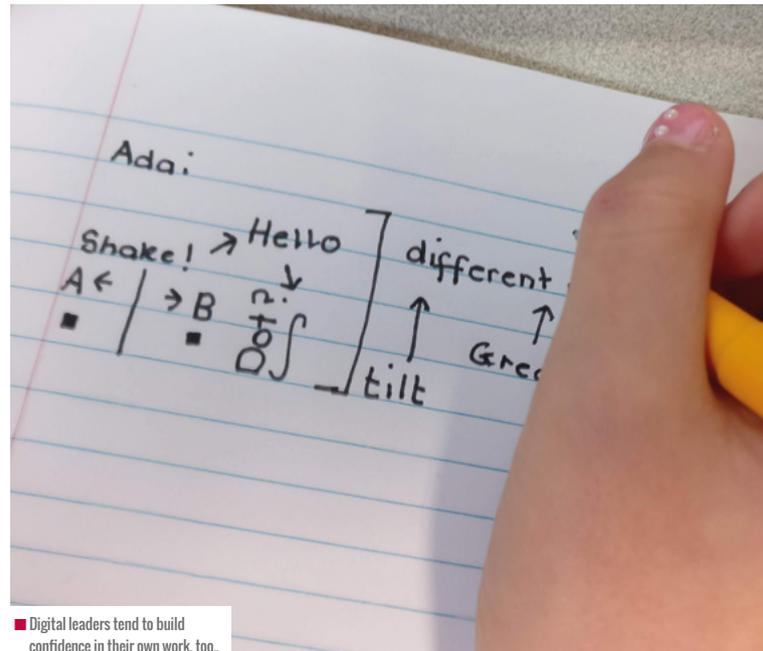
Katie Vanderpere-Brown: This year, I'm exploring joining a DL role with existing systems that work using dedicated teacher time and a paid TLR. I hope we will make digital leaders a subset of our vibrant student voice and student leadership team. The students are led by a TLR holder; the kids are keen and confident in that group and there are already structures around communication and meetings in place to communicate with all students, but also to get feedback from them in what they're interested in knowing about.

Brett Laniosh: Brett cited an example of a Worcestershire secondary school he worked with, which used its digital leaders working alongside the curriculum leader for computing and an external supplier to review a range of hardware. It was a very valuable and worthwhile activity.

Sarah Zaman: Meetings involving DLs seem to be more popular. I would keep my DLs after school doing some of the latest projects and then ask local teachers to bring their own digital leaders to join in some of the activities. The teachers could speak to the children, see new ideas in action, and chat to other teachers.

FURTHER READING

- Hello World, issue 2: Sway Grantham's 'Children teaching children (and teachers)', page 68.
- Mary Mags Pi Club: marymagspiclub.wordpress.com
- Louise Stone - having worked out a list of all the things we wanted to do, we signed our agreement to show our commitment to the role rrisdigitalleaders.primaryblogger.co.uk/digital-helpers/signing-our-job-agreement-rris-3
- Article in Headteacher Update: headteacher-update.com/best-practice-article/what-are-digital-leaders/82465
- Chris Sharples has written a very comprehensive guide here: gr8computing.com/dlroadmap, and also a few blog posts tagged DL: gr8computing.com/category/digital-leaders
- Enamel badges, for those who don't want to design and make their own: schoolbadgesuk.co.uk/products/digital-leader-shield-badge
- Pixel badges: schoolstickers.com/en-gb/digital-leader-pixel-lapel
- Government Digital Services - set out what they think makes a good digital leader. Not intended for school use, but serves to show how the role is relevant to work in government and industry: gds.blog.gov.uk/2018/06/21/what-makes-someone-a-good-digital-leader
- Digital leaders Facebook group, with strong emphasis on online safety: facebook.com/groups/PDLNUK
- Digital classrooms: digitaleclassrooms.co.uk/using-primary-aged-digital-leaders
- Martin Bailey blogpost: animate2educate.co.uk/web/bett_show_blog_day_4/262091



■ Digital leaders tend to build confidence in their own work, too.

Claire Buckler: We have a digital leader programme that gives students real useable skills for real situations. The majority of them are not taking GCSE CS.

Ceri Cook: Our digital leaders look after equipment, make sure it's all put back in the right place, and leave stern posters when it isn't. They troubleshoot any problems, ready to pass on to our tech people. They 'train' children and staff in apps etc, such as younger children wanting to use the green screen. I dithered for ages about setting them up, I really thought it would be a hassle but I was wrong; I have a mix of Year 5 and 6 so each time a year group leaves there are already established digital leaders in place. They are really on the ball now – they even stood up in assembly last week and explained how to look after the equipment.

Martin Bailey: This year, my DLs will be presenting in one of the Bett arenas alongside me. I think pupils have a lot to offer to events like Bett.

Dee Chamberlain: We use ours to support the younger children when they are learning to log on to our server. They work with them at lunch or break, and it makes a huge difference. They download photos from iPads as well as being responsible for taking them. They set up the hall computer ready for assemblies and ensure laptops and mobile technology are charged and ready for use. They also help staff and pupils by troubleshooting, making information videos so parents can see, for example, how we teach multiplying by 10 etc. Everyone appreciates them and they do a great job.

Nat Jay: I get mine to run a lunchtime club for the little ones, which they love doing – they plan all the sessions, send [relevant] letters out and take a register.

Mandy Nash: Start the digital leaders off just doing small jobs, checking on iPads, providing PowerPoint help for assemblies.

For more free and friendly advice about making the most of digital leaders, contact Alan O'Donohoe via alan@exa.foundation or on Twitter: [@ExaFoundation](https://twitter.com/ExaFoundation). (HW)