

Ask a scientist - RMPS Science Week 2021

Heather, Forensic Scientist

Mohammed in P1 - How do you work for the police?

In Scotland, the Forensic Service is part of the police. We are called the 'Scottish Police Authority'. We are not police officers, but we work with the police. We can investigate crimes and report our results to the Head of the Scottish Courts (the Procurator Fiscal).

What do you have to be good at to do your job (skills/subjects at school)?

I have to be good at thinking outside the box and solving problems to do my job. No two crime scenes are the same and a suspect could leave their evidence in many different places or ways. To do my job, you need to be good at science or photography, or go to university to study 'Forensic Biology' like me.

Theodora in P1 - What clues do you look for?

I look for DNA which might be found as saliva, hair or skin cells. I wonder what things the suspect might have touched or moved as they might have left some evidence on these things too. I look for the fingerprints using special powders. I also look for shoe prints, glass, paint, and clothes fibres.

How can you see the fingerprints?

Some fingerprints can be seen if they are in a substance like grease, dust, dirt or paint. If I cannot see a fingerprint (like on a window or a window frame), I can use a powder to make it visible.

What equipment do you need?

I use a digital camera and my fingerprint powders/brushes every day. There are other pieces of special equipment which help us too like a coloured light source or a chemical spray.

Eyad in P1 - How do you solve the mysteries?

The evidence that I find is sent to a laboratory, so they can find out if it matches a suspect on the database (fingerprints and DNA), if not, the evidence will help the police put together a picture puzzle of what happened, and they can look for the suspect in other ways like CCTV. If they think they have found this person, their DNA and fingerprints will solve the last piece of the puzzle if they match the evidence that I find at the scene of the crime.