



# be that teacher

**assistive technologies**  
in mainstream classrooms





## THE PROPOSITION

- **Assistive Technologies have the power and potential to change education and life outcomes for millions of people globally**
- Microlink wish to begin a journey of change by offering school communities a proven, coached programme of Assistive Technology training and leadership development for professionals in a 1000 school communities across the UK
- Impacting on approx. 50,000 teaching professionals
- Reaching over 475,000 children and young people, of which
  - Over 78,000 have identified Special Education Needs
  - Over 80,000 have unidentified Dyslexia and related conditions
  - Over 119,000 living in poverty (which has a demonstrable negative impact on communication skills and thus academic achievement)
  - Over 95,000 having low literacy levels (including children affected by migration)
- Scalable to enable a global reach, using Assistive Technologies to bridge language and cultural systemic barriers to progress and attainment.

Over **200 school communities** benefited from the Department for Education-funded programmes, delivered by Microlink Education. A further 200 have actively participated in the first iteration of **be thAT teacher**, generously sponsored by **HSBC Bank** so that training and resources could be **delivered free** to participating schools.

**Evaluation of impact has been extremely positive.**

We are now seeking to extend this programme by attracting corporate sponsorship so that the complete programme, including all training and resources, will be made available free to all participating school communities.

**Change cannot be driven by a 2-hour presentation.**

**This is why Microlink is offering schools a year-long coached programme**, led by experts, which not only illuminates the power and potential of Assistive Technologies (many free to use and hidden in plain sight!), but will also support middle and senior leaders to embed change, leading to transformed learning outcomes within your school community now and into the future.

**Please join us. Please Be ThAT teacher.**

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## THE PREMISE

### Making a case for Assistive Technologies in every classroom

#### Assistive Technologies:

- Enable greater independence by the users – it allows them to achieve and perform tasks that they were previously unable to do or found difficult.
- In terms of IT systems, they range from voice recognition programs, screen readers, and screen enlargement applications, closed captioning, speech-to-text and text-to-speech, and cognitive support and development systems to overcome specific learning challenges.

Accessible technology embraces universal design principles, supporting the widest group of users possible.

In schools, Assistive Technologies can be deployed in a way that creates personalised learning experiences for individual pupils in their classrooms, beyond those with identified needs.

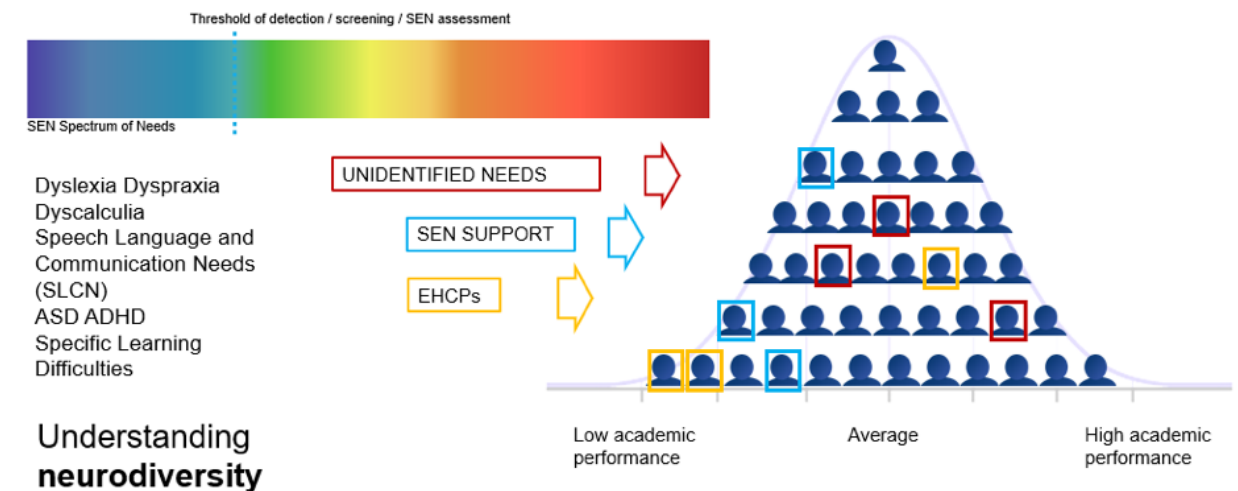
“For people without disabilities, technology makes things easier. For people with disabilities technology makes things possible.”

Judy Heumann

We know Assistive Technologies can transform learning outcomes for children and young people with funded plans (EHCPs or Individual Education Plans) to address their identified challenges: this is a given.

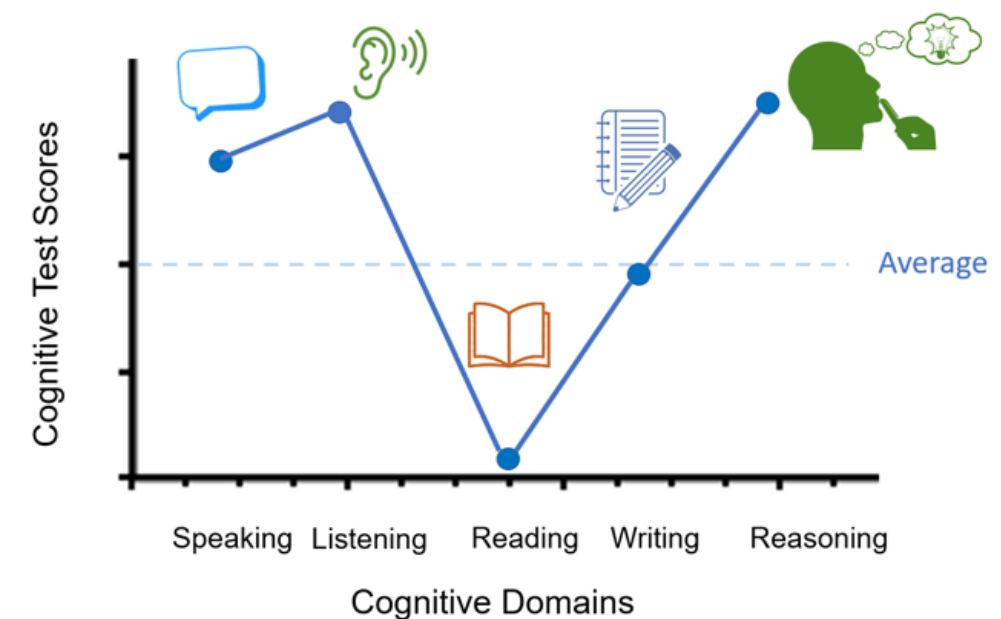
**However, Assistive Technologies can have a far wider impact.**

Our knowledge and understanding of neurodiversity and neurodivergence have increased markedly in the last thirty years. We now know that many learning challenges are manifest as a spectrum of needs, from barely noticeable to profound.

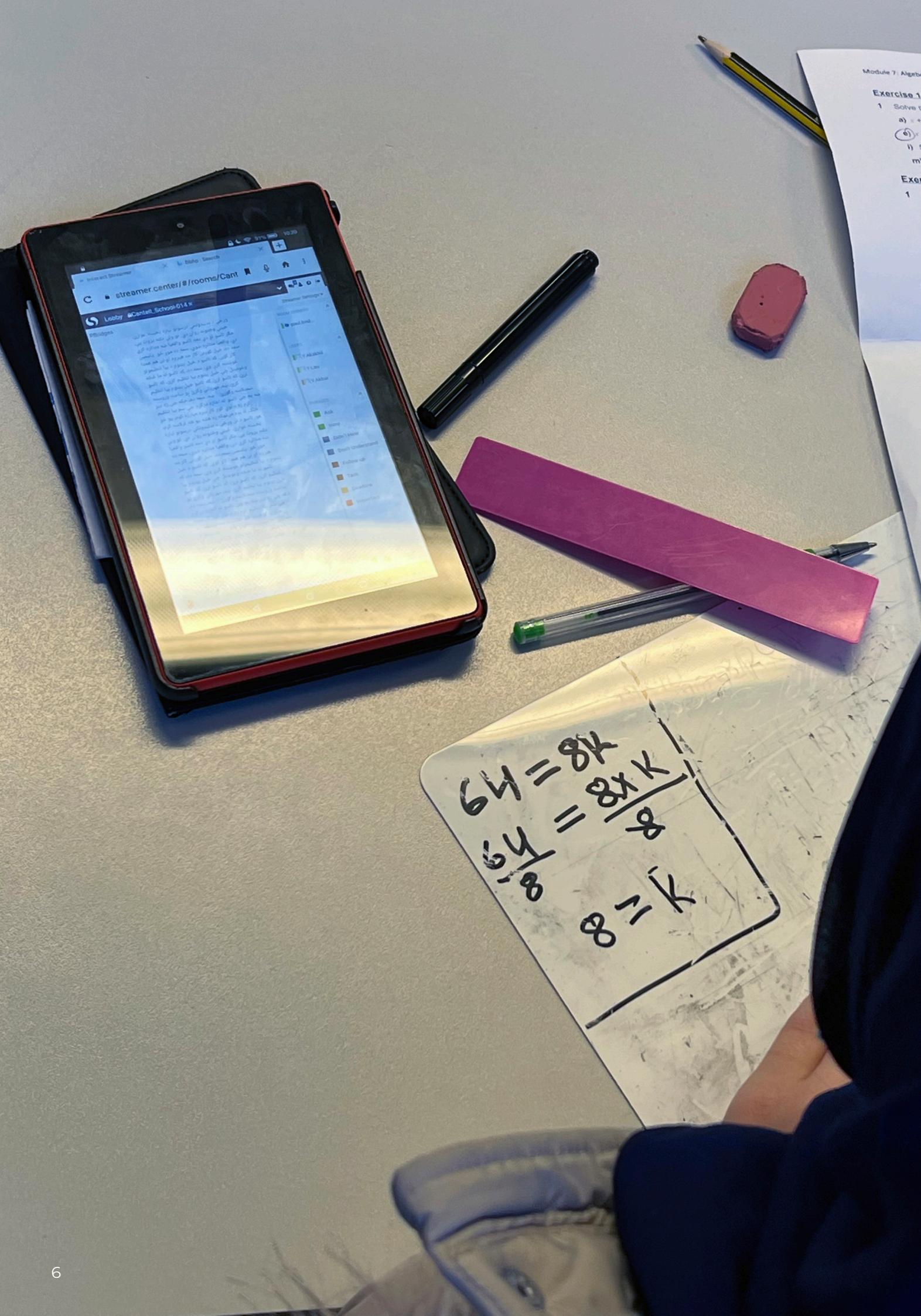


Traditional teaching approaches create barriers to learning and accessing curriculums for some children, these problems and challenges fall below the threshold for Special Education Needs Support (SEN): Yet others may have degrees of Dyslexia that have been masked by competencies in other aspects of learning (a “spikey profile”).

**For example, the British Dyslexia Association estimates that over 70% of children with Dyslexia go unnoticed in schools today.**





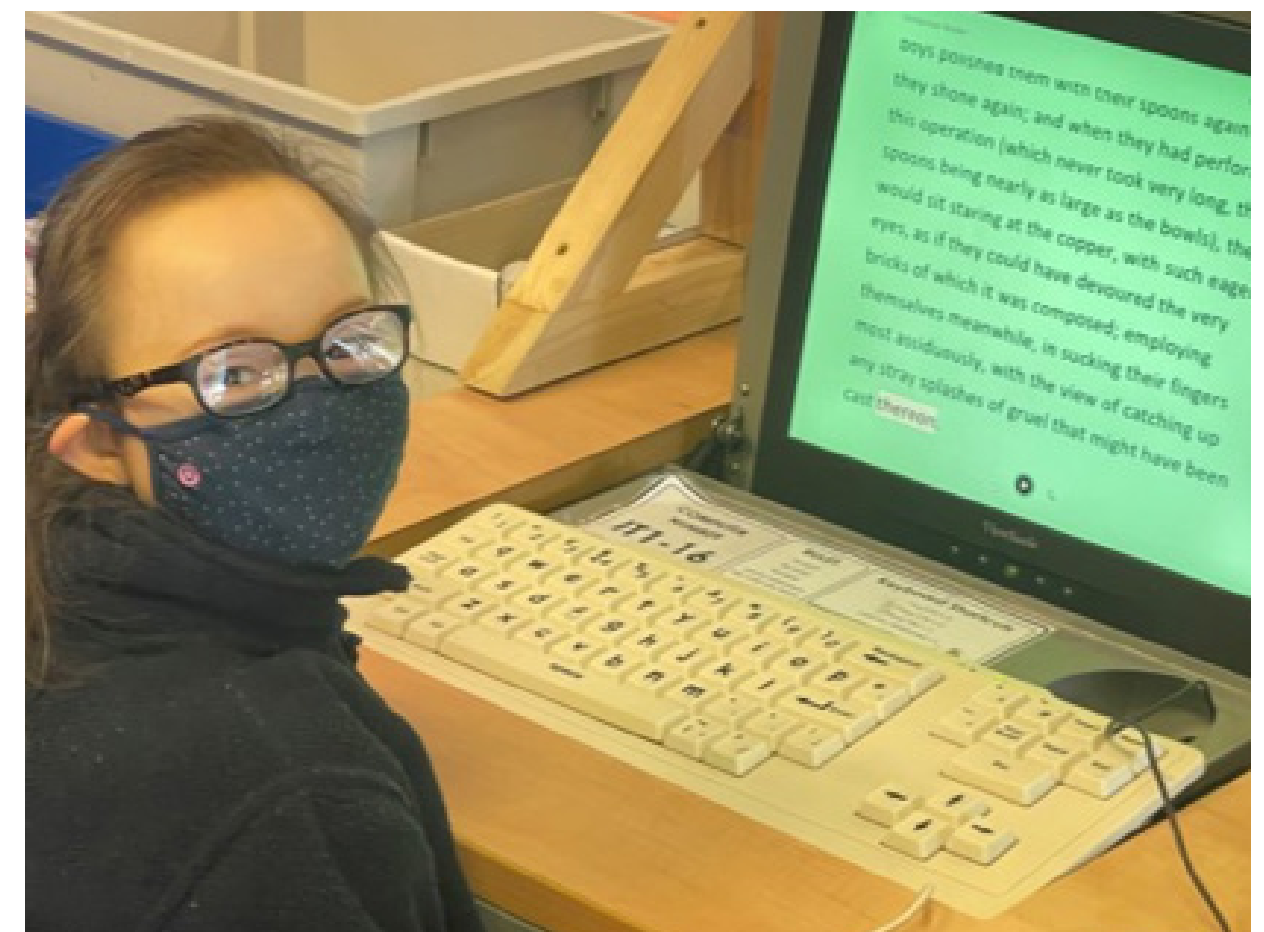


Other children have **Delayed Language Development** that can compromise understanding and expression but might fall below the threshold for triggering SEN Support. **Again, Assistive Technologies can be a powerful tool to support and enable children in the classroom and beyond.**

Assistive Technologies can also help support schools overcome another critical hidden barrier to learning: **Speech Language and Communication Needs** that are associated with children who have lived in poverty. **In other words, children and young people disabled by circumstance.**

For example, one study found that **children from the poorest fifth of homes are on average 19 months behind children from the richest homes in their use of vocabulary by the age of five.**

The intelligent deployment of assistive technologies could have a profound impact on the academic progress of children in receipt of free school meals, and for that matter **Children Affected by Migration... whatever their age.**





In summary, growing the use of Assistive Technologies in a school community will:

- Save teacher/TA time
- Free up staff to help more learners
- Improve learner independence and behaviour
- Raise attainment

We are encouraging school communities to:

**EXPLORE** the range of AT opportunities that exist to support mainstream classroom practice,

**INNOVATE** by applying tools to meet the specific needs of individual children (Child-Centred Innovation) and encourage independent use, and finally:

**TRANSFORM** outcomes for all children as the use of AT becomes as embedded as using touchscreens, pens and pencils!

*These are the branded logos schools will get at the end of the programme (we are grateful to HSBC Bank for sponsoring the first wave of free training to school communities):*





## IMPACT FROM PILOT PROGRAMME

(75 school communities in 2022 – now extended to 150 schools starting March 2023)

“We are 95% English as an additional language - I am going to get (Translation App) installed on the Office Admin PC, so that they can use it to communicate with parents and carers in the Reception area!”

“Thank you so much. I felt daunted coming in, but you have demystified the process and I am now very excited!”

“Loving this project. It is really opening up avenues and opportunities for our pupils and school community.”

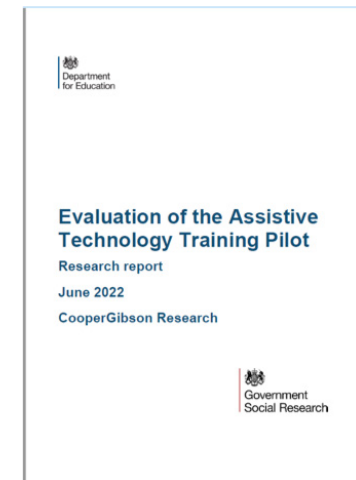
“AT is not as scary a prospect as I thought...going to revisit Immersive Reader and associated tools with pupils! Thank you!”

“I’m really looking forward to trying out Immersive Reader, I think it is quite a simple tool that will have a huge impact. I think there’s a lot of AT that is quite accessible and easy for staff to use but we just aren’t aware of it so I’m looking forward to learning more.”

“Helperbird is a gamechanger x 8”

“Hello I have dyslexia and have coloured glasses. I have never heard of Immersive Reader and I already know I will be using this myself and know I will be able to share this with staff and this will benefit children in children. Had I known about this when I was in school I know it would have been such a benefit to me.”

“Page 9: AT Champions were excited and surprised at how easy it was to access and implement freely available assistive technology tools.”



**95%**  
of AT Champions found the training and the resources useful

**98%**  
of AT Champions praised the expertise and approach of the trainers

<https://youtu.be/E8HqjySABus>



AT Pilot - Review





## WHY DOES IT WORK?

- The programme has been written by teaching professionals for teaching professionals
- Peer-to-peer networking and a team approach to professional development and training
- Fundamentally designed to engage, instill insights, motivate goal orientated behaviour, develop techniques and embed practice (As described as best practice in the EEF review of effective teacher professional development)
- Not only develops an awareness of the type and range of Assistive Technology available: it encourages child- centred innovation, a needs-driven methodology rather than a dash to a technological solution
- Tried and tested training and support materials developed from a suite of resources, derived from the DfE-funded AT Test and Learn project, delivered in partnership with the leading SEN NGO nasen, and licensed under the [Open Government Licence v3.0](#)



## THE PROGRAMME

Participating schools will nominate an **AT Champion** who will attend a series of **three online workshops, spaced 4 to 6-weeks apart**.

Group size will be deliberately kept small, with regular breakout sessions to empower discussion, reflection and solution-focused thinking.

The sessions combine the best elements from the DfE-funded AT Test and Learn Programme with the development of change management skills and approaches that nominated AT Champions can put to use immediately to support change management.

**The overall aims and objectives of Be ThAT Teacher are to help SENCOs, Middle Leaders, Senior Leaders and similar postholders to:**

1. **Enhance Awareness and Understanding of Assistive Technology (AT):** Equip school staff with comprehensive knowledge of AT, its benefits, and applications in mainstream classrooms, tailored to different levels of AT awareness and school contexts.
2. Identify and Implement **Quick Wins with AT:** Discover and utilize **free** or **built-in** Assistive Technology tools, learning how to integrate them effectively into mainstream classroom settings to support diverse learner needs.
3. **Engage in Hands-On Practice with AT:** Encourage school staff to experiment with new Assistive Technology features or apps with students and colleagues, fostering a culture of innovation and practical application.
4. **Reflect on Progress and Share Successes:** Conduct progress checks to evaluate the impact of AT training, share successes, reflect on challenges, and provide feedback on initial experiences with AT implementation.
5. **Complete Needs Analysis and Benchmarking:** Guide school staff through the Needs Analysis Framework, supporting how to complete the benchmarking process, log their scores, and use this data to inform future AT strategies and interventions.

On the successful completion of the programme, and after submitting benchmark scores through a simple data collection process online, participating schools will receive an **AT Explorer, Innovator or Transformer** logo in acknowledgement of participation and achievement (see Page 8).

Participating staff will also receive personalised acknowledgement for AT change leadership with a CPD Accreditation Service Certificate.



## SESSION 1: Be ThAT Teacher – An Introduction to the Programme- Setting the Scene

- **Course overview:** Making a case for Assistive Technologies
- **Hidden disability...** and broadening the social model of disability to include children and young people disabled by circumstance
- **Quick wins, first steps, big strides:** what is “built in” and how it can be used in mainstream classrooms?
- **The Learning Journey:** How can we help you?

## SESSION 2: Where are we now? Where do we want to be?

- **Progress check- Where are you now?** Celebrating successes and reflecting on challenges
- **The Needs Analysis Framework- Where do you want to be?** A method to benchmark, set goals and capture change. An introduction to the Microlink resource bank.
- **Explorer – Innovator – Transformer:** the terms as applied to the use and application of AT
- **Advice Guidance and Support** What’s New in AT? Workshops, regular support sessions, ad hoc support from coaching team

## SESSION 3: Celebrating progress: Next steps

- **Impact – Ideas – Solutions** Celebrating a journey travelled, sharing successes, challenges, innovations and opportunities
- **Looking Ahead:** Future engagement with the community of practice and access to resources

**There will be additional workshops throughout the year, showcasing some of the most effective tools and products that are being used or are emerging.**

**be thAT teacher!**

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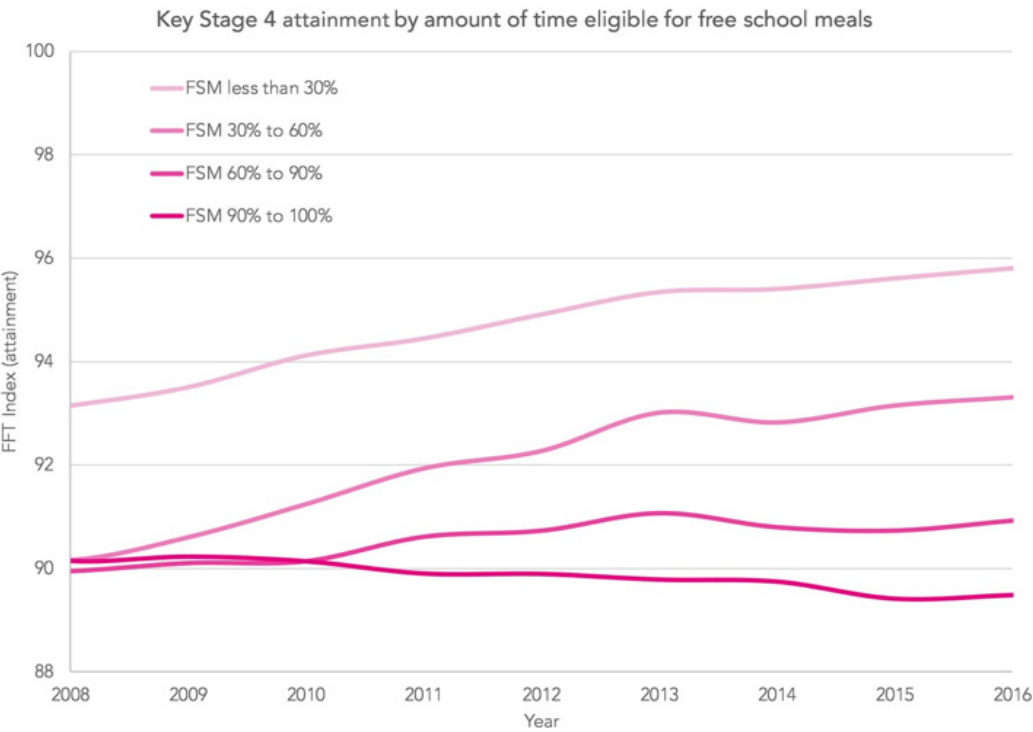
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# ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

## Making a case for AT as a Pupil Premium intervention- children disabled by circumstance (additional data and graphics)

Our understanding of the impact of poverty on child progress has grown significantly in the past two decades, as has our understanding of the impact of cumulative Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on life chances. The research data is clear.



<https://fteducationdatalab.org.uk/2017/07/long-term-disadvantage-part-one-challenges-and-successes/>

This analysis from FFT (Fischer Family Trust) looks at GCSE performance of children who have been in receipt of free school meals (FSMs) for different percentages of time during their school lives 5-16 yrs old.

Although attainment has been improving for some groups, for example those FSM-eligible for less than 60% of their time in schools, the improvement has been much less for pupils who were FSM-eligible for between 60% and 90% of the time.

And for pupils who were Free School Meal-eligible on almost every occasion the school census is taken (90% or more of the time), their attainment, relative to the national average, has actually been falling.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://fteducationdatalab.org.uk/2017/07/long-term-disadvantage-part-one-challenges-and-successes/>

Other data from research illuminates the issue from different perspectives. For example, a significant factor could be the prevalence of Speech Language and Communication Needs in disadvantaged communities, which are manifest as early as ages 3 and 5, and, from the graphic above, having profound impact by the age of 16.

## 1.2 Million children in the UK struggle to communicate



## 1 in 10 children have a complex or persistent SLCN

Within that 10% are children and young people who have SLCN as a result of another condition such as Autism, hearing impairment, general learning difficulties, etc.

**7%** are children who have SLCN as their main or primary difficulty - also referred to as Specific Language Impairment (**SLI**)

**1%** have severe and complex SLCN

Data from the communication charity ICAN<sup>2</sup>

## Between 40 and 50% of children growing up in socially disadvantaged areas are starting school with delayed language



## Approximately 50% of children in some socio-economically disadvantaged populations have speech and language skills that are significantly lower than those of other children of the same age

From <sup>3</sup> and <sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <https://ican.org.uk/>

<sup>3</sup> Locke, A., Ginsborg, J. and Peers, I. (2002) Development and Disadvantage: implications for early years IJLCD Vol 37:1

<sup>4</sup> Lindsay, G., et al (2008) Effective and Efficient Use of Resources in Services for Children and Young People with Speech, Language and Communication Needs DCSF Research Report RW053



**Children from the poorest fifth of homes are on average 19 months behind children from the richest homes in their use of vocabulary by the age of five**

Bradbury, B, Corak, M, Waldfogel, J & Washbrook, (2012), Inequality in Early Childhood Outcomes

From <sup>5</sup>

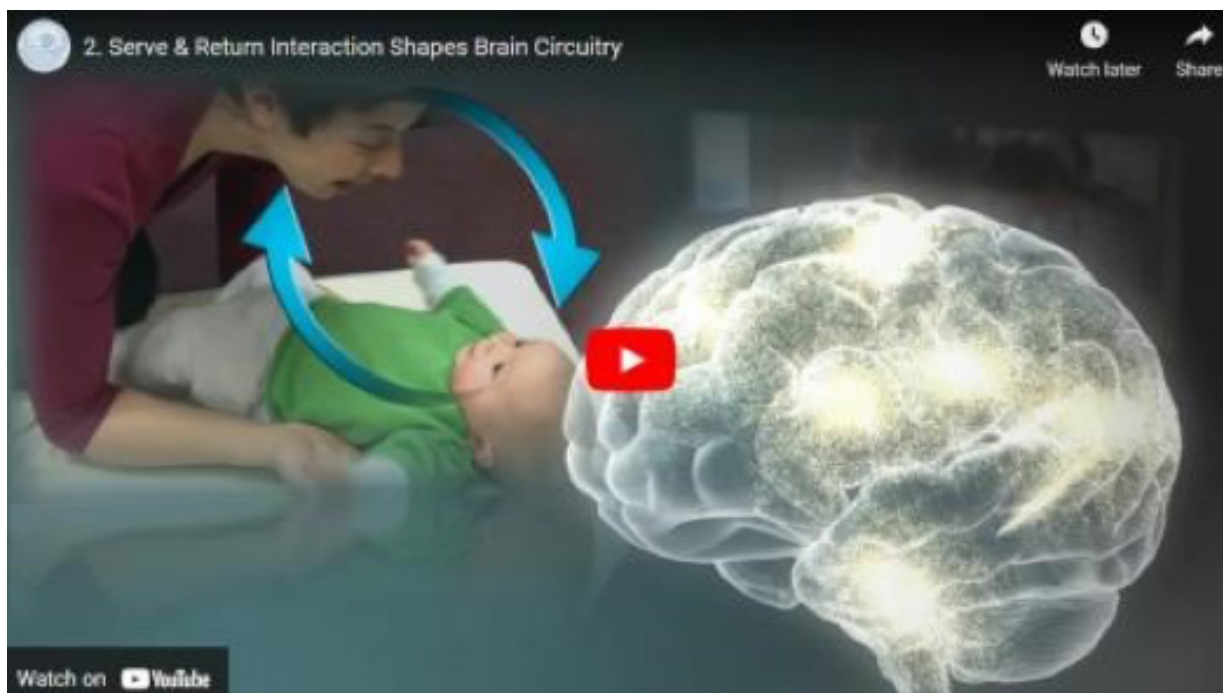
Why is poverty such a barrier to early language development, which in turn impacts on access to teaching and learning, and future academic success?

### Brain science may give us some clues.

The social interaction between adults and babies in the earliest years has a profound impact on the growing brain.

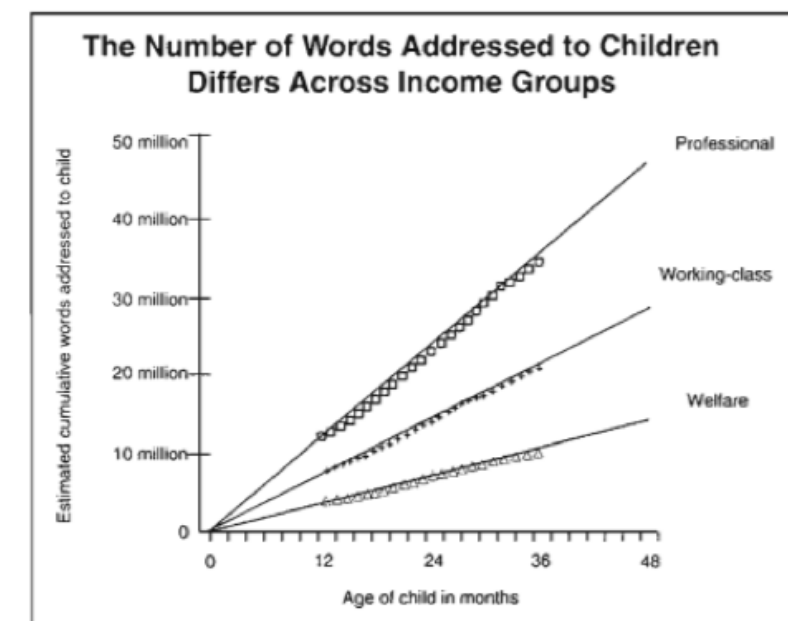
The following 2 min video illustrates how social interactions shape the networks in the developing brain.

Watch from 0:50mins in to understand the critical link between social interaction and literacy development. [https://youtu.be/m\\_5u8-QSh6A](https://youtu.be/m_5u8-QSh6A)



But what if social interaction is compromised by poverty: when adult caregivers, with absolutely no deficit in the amount of love they show, are stressed and distracted by wondering where the next meal will come from, or how to pay the rent or heating bill?

In one seminal study, the difference in the number of words addressed to children (when families on welfare were compared to professional families) differed by a staggering 30 million words by the age of 3!



From <https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/TheEarlyCatastrophe.pdf>

The study also illustrated the profound impact this gap had on school outcomes 7 and 8 years later<sup>6</sup>.

Let us never underestimate the social and emotional impact of poverty on the wellbeing of parents, which then becomes an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) that in turn impacts on their children's life chances.

### Deploying Assistive Technologies in creative ways across mainstream provision can help to close that 30-million-word gap... at any age and any phase.

Marius Frank, Head of Education at Microlink, presented a paper at **ATIA 2023** about extending the social model of disability to include children disabled by circumstance.

[Read or listen here.](#)

<https://www.microlinkpc.com/blog/thought-leadership-marius-frank/>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228251730\\_Inequality\\_During\\_the\\_Early\\_Years\\_Child\\_Outcomes\\_and\\_Readiness\\_to\\_Learn\\_in\\_Australia\\_Canada\\_United\\_Kingdom\\_and\\_United\\_States](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228251730_Inequality_During_the_Early_Years_Child_Outcomes_and_Readiness_to_Learn_in_Australia_Canada_United_Kingdom_and_United_States)

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.wvearlychildhood.org/resources/C-13\\_Handout\\_1.pdf](http://www.wvearlychildhood.org/resources/C-13_Handout_1.pdf)



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