



‘Be ThAT Teacher’ takes off! Microlink and HSBC in partnership to create accessible classrooms for every child

*“Thanks to this course, the life of one of
my pupils has been transformed.”*

What is the Be ThAT Teacher programme and how did it come about?

November 2023 saw the launch of "**Be ThAT Teacher**", a project designed to unlock the power and potential of Assistive Technologies in mainstream classrooms, aimed at closing the gap and raising the bar in terms of children's progress and attainment.

Between January 2022 and July 2023, Microlink Education designed and delivered two school improvement projects, funded by the Department for Education, and involving over two hundred primary and secondary schools. The training programme aimed to develop awareness and understanding of the power of assistive technologies to transform mainstream classroom provision.

The programmes were an unqualified success, with impact seen in terms of pupil engagement, motivation and access to learning.

What partnering with HSBC means for the Be ThAT Teacher programme

Microlink is delighted to announce that it is working with HSBC to enable an updated training programme to be accessed *free of charge* by over 150 more schools and colleges.

Technologies that enable, for example, text-to-speech and speech-to-text have taken a dramatic leap forward in recent years, opening up new possibilities for

supporting children with learning needs to access high-quality teaching, and also to demonstrate their learning and understanding in new and exciting ways.

The British Dyslexia Association asserts that 70% of children with Dyslexia in school go unnoticed. If Assistive Technologies become as widespread and as easy to use in class as a pencil and paper, independence, confidence and higher levels of progress will undoubtedly follow!

What key participants and supporters of the course have to say about Be ThAT Teacher:

Programme Director **Nic Ponsford** said:

"Technology is the equaliser for our time. As the digital revolution continues, schools need to provide inclusive teaching and learning practices for all students that not only utilise new technologies for our learners today, but for their future needs too.

"This fully funded 'Be ThAT Teacher' programme is a joyous celebration of EdTech and the universal model of design, meaning classrooms and curriculums can be easily personalised for students and their cognitive, physical and emotional needs, all at the push of a button.

"I am proud to be leading on this and thank you HSBC!"

Participating teachers and leaders have had nothing but praise for this education initiative:

Chris Ayling from Warren Park School in Hampshire said: *"The Microlink AT training has transformed the way we look at inclusive teaching and learning. Developing our understanding and awareness of assistive technology has enabled us to maximise the way we can open up our curriculum for all children.*

"The AT training provided valuable insights into the transformative nature of assistive technology, enabling personalised learning experiences for all students in our classrooms, not just those with recognised needs.

"I am genuinely enthusiastic about the immense possibilities AT offer, extending far beyond the confines of the classroom." Said Chris.

"Assistive technology has the potential to become indispensable tools in our daily lives, serving as a comprehensive life toolkit."

"We will leave no stone unturned in our pursuit to provide the best educational experience for our young people." said **Harry Kutty**,

Headteacher of Cantell School in Southampton. *"For some, through no fault of their own, learning can be harder and more challenging because of cognitive barriers. We are pleased that our work with Microlink and in particular our use of assistive technologies has enhanced our already strong SEND provision and for some has been quite simply life changing."*

Malintha Fernando MBE, HSBC Head of Accessibility said: *"At HSBC we understand the power of technology to change lives and be a provider of opportunity. We are proud to partner with Microlink to create a more inclusive education system."*

A last word from **Dr Nasser Siabi OBE**, CEO of Microlink:

"Teachers work unbelievably hard. They haven't got the time to review and evaluate the ever-changing range of assistive technology solutions that are available. But we do. It is simply wonderful to be able to bring our knowledge and accumulated wisdom into learning communities throughout the UK. I am absolutely delighted when a teacher says "Wow! I didn't know that!". I am thrilled when a 7- or 8-year-old child says "Can I have this at home as well as at school please?".

Our mantra is "Creating pathways of opportunity from the classroom to the boardroom, for every child" by removing any barrier to learning that might exist. We hope Be ThAT Teacher is a small step in the right direction."

How you can get involved

Our ambition is to bring this programme to another 1000 schools over the next two years.

We invite more schools to join us on this journey.

Another opportunity to join the programme commences on **21st February 2024**.

Expression of Interest Form: <https://www.microlinkpc.com/be-that-teacher/>

Additional Information

1. A short video illustrating the impact of the programme in two schools: <https://youtu.be/YV9QoWo5he8>

2. Some quotes from teachers who completed the six-month coaches training programme

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

“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 Text-to-Speech apps, I think they are quite simple tools 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”

“...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.”

“The relaxed, elongated style of delivery understands the pressures on schools and individuals, allows for quick wins but then gives time to implement wider changes”

3. Information about Microlink PC UK Ltd

Microlink was founded 30 years ago on the grounded principles of people focused solutions to overcoming barriers to working and learning.

The company was set up with a focus on supporting Higher Education students with disabilities by two entrepreneurs with disabilities themselves.

Through the nineties, Microlink executives played a leading role in the evolution of the DSA (Disabled Student Allowance).

Attention then turned to transforming the process of Workplace Adjustments.

Using the social model of disability as a guiding compass, Microlink pioneered the streamlining of assessment solutions and support (through the development of expert triage), introducing fast track solutions with standardized packages, reducing costs and driving up quality, supported by business processes that enabled the on-boarding of multi-national corporate clients to exacting standards and timelines, all to the benefit of any person with a disability in the workplace.

In 2011 CEO Dr Nasser Siabi was awarded an OBE for his contribution in helping over 300,000 disabled people transition from education into work. By 2023, the number has risen to well over 500,000.

4. More information about “Be ThAT Teacher” 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.

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.

Our knowledge and understanding of neurodiversity 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.

For some children who have problems accessing learning, 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.

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

Other children have **Developmental Language Disorders** 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 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.**

Be ThAT Teacher works because:

- It is led by teaching professionals for teaching professionals
- It encourages peer-to-peer networking and a team approach to professional development and training
- It is fundamentally designed to engage, instil 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 that was delivered in partnership with the leading SEN NGO nasen, and licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0

5. For more information please contact:

Anna Moody Marketing Manager Microlink PC UK Ltd

e: anna.moody@microlinkpc.com

t: 02380 240330

Stephen Chatha Global Project Manager | Group Digital Experience
and Accessibility HSBC Group PLC

e: stephen.chatha@hsbc.com

Nic Ponsford Project Leader | Co-Head of Education Microlink PC UK (Ltd)

e: nicole.ponsford@microlinkpc.com