Be ThAT Teacher Impact Report 2025

Dr Nicole Ponsford and Marius Frank

Co-Heads of Education

Microlink PC UK Ltd

Contents

Overview

The **Be ThAT Teacher** Professional Development Programme has been designed to do two things:

- Raise awareness about the power and potential of using **Assistive Technologies (AT) (including AI) in mainstream classrooms** to improve the learning outcomes of all children, especially those with a wide variety of social, emotional and additional needs and barriers to learning, sometimes hidden or unidentified; and second,
- Give schools the **tools and strategies to embed and sustain change**.

A generous grant was made available by HSBC to extend the reach of the original DfE-funded pilot project to 100 more school communities in 2023-24 and has also supported school engagement and product development into 2024-25. We are delighted to report that this target has been exceeded by 50%. **Impact has been significant.**

The sponsorship funding has enabled the creation of new approaches and new opportunities to engage with yet more schools, within an educational/political climate that has changed significantly for the better. With a dramatic increase in Government activity around AI (Artificial Intelligence) in Education, Be ThAT Teacher is well aligned to the current transformational imperatives.

The Be ThAT Teacher programme has delivered measurable impact across the UK and beyond by equipping educators with the confidence, tools, and strategies to embed Assistive Technology (AT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) into inclusive classroom practices.

Designed to address the needs of diverse learners, particularly those with SEND, EAL, and other support requirements, the programme has helped reduce stigma, build capacity, and support system-level change in both mainstream and alternative provision settings.

The Programme

Be ThAT Teacher provides accessible, practical professional development on inclusive technology. The training supports teachers, leaders, and TAs (Teaching Assistants) to understand, trial, and implement AT and AI to improve access, engagement, and independence for all learners.

Delivered through webinars, CPD sessions, and technical support, the programme is tailored to a range of educational contexts, from primary and secondary to alternative provision and multi-academy trusts (MATs).

New in 2025: Be ThAT TA (Teaching Assistant) In response to school feedback and demand for more targeted support for Teaching Assistants, we launched a sister course, **Be ThAT TA**. This course offers practical training designed specifically for support staff, with a focus on how AT can be embedded into daily classroom routines to help meet the needs of diverse learners.

Be ThAT TA equips TAs with:

- A deeper understanding of how AT can reduce barriers to learning
- Practical tools and strategies they can apply immediately
- Confidence to advocate for inclusive practice alongside teaching staff

Early feedback from pilot schools shows high levels of engagement and increased confidence among participants.

Plans are underway to expand access to Be ThAT TA in the 2025–26 cycle.

Background

The challenge

- It is estimated that nearly 20% of adults in England, or 9 million people, lack the most basic literacy and numeracy skills essential for working and living[1]. Many of these adults have struggled from their earliest years, falling behind their peers at school, affecting confidence and self-esteem, making it difficult to get and keep jobs and navigating everyday living

- Our understanding of neurodiversity[2] has grown significantly over the past twenty years. Despite this, Made by Dyslexia[3] asserts that up to 80% of children with dyslexia go unnoticed and unsupported in schools, hidden in plain sight, compliant, many well behaved, but failing dismally to reach their full potential. This can lead to being "missing from education" even when attending classes! The impact on life chances, and future earning potential, is significant[4].

- The GEC's *26,000 Voices* report[5], which captures the experiences of tens of thousands of students and staff, reveals a stark reality: **over half of SEND students (56%) feel their needs are not fully understood by their teachers**, and **one in three students with invisible disabilities say their needs go unaddressed**.

- The range and capability of AT tools and services are developing at such a rapid pace that already hard-pressed teaching professionals are falling behind in terms of awareness and knowledge, missing opportunities to use AT in new and innovative ways to support learning, unlock progress and accelerate achievement.

- The World Health Organisation reports that, with an ageing global population and rising levels of uncommunicable diseases, an estimated 3.5 billion people will need assistive technology (AT) by 2050. And in many countries, people who most need AT do not have access to it[6].

---

[1] https://learningandwork.org.uk/news-and-policy/work-local-its-time-to-make-devolution-work/

[2] https://childmind.org/article/what-is-neurodiversity/

[3] https://www.madebydyslexia.org/wp-content/uploads/Dyslexia-The-School-Report.pdf

[4] https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/disability-progress-littered-missed-opportunities-and-failures

[5] https://www.thegec.education/the-research

[6] https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/assistive-technology

The opportunity

Microlink understands the challenges and has developed solutions.

Microlink has over 30 years of sector-leading experience in DSA[7] and WPA[8], improving the lives of 500,000 individuals in Higher Education and as employees, as well as a proven ability to promote new and emerging technologies into widespread effective use. Microlink is now bringing this knowledge and experience into an education system desperate for change.

In just three years, Microlink has accumulated a network of over 700 named contacts in primary and secondary schools across England.

Microlink has also successfully delivered two Department of Education-funded pilot programmes aimed at developing the use of Assistive Technologies in mainstream classrooms (for over 200 Primary and Secondary schools).

The recent Independent Review of our second DfE-funded project has completely validated our model[9]:

"Following the AT training course, participants reported significant improvements in the independence (92% and 78%) and confidence (89% and 78%) of SEND and EAL pupils respectively.

"Around six-in-ten (61%) also reported improved confidence and over half (58%) reported improved independence levels in non-SEND and non-EAL pupils.

"Additionally, the use of AT had positive impacts on the behaviour and engagement of SEND pupils (86%) and EAL pupils (67%) in a majority of participating schools. It also

---

[7] Disabled Student Access (Higher Education)

[8] Work Place Adjustments

[9] Assistive Technology Test and Learn evaluation IFF Research

had a positive impact on the levels of attainment of SEND pupils (64%) and EAL pupils (47%)." p.11

Be ThAT Teacher continues to grow and evolve from the earlier programmes:

- Creating the possibility for Assistive Technologies to be deployed in all mainstream primary and secondary classrooms, meeting unidentified as well as identified needs, thus removing barriers to learning at source and unlocking progress and achievement. Our vision is that children will eventually reach out themselves for an appropriate Assistive Technology as they would do a pencil or pen.

- Giving school leaders a comprehensive AT change management toolkit, empowering learning communities to continue to develop and grow capacity, capability and effectiveness beyond the training programme

- Ensure that frontline professionals are made aware of the latest AT developments, so that their learning communities can immediately benefit from cost-effective innovation in a rapidly changing world.

In September 2023, thanks to the **generous sponsorship of HSBC Bank**, Microlink was given the resource to recruit another 100 primary and secondary schools and deliver the Be ThAT Teacher training programme to lead professionals in these learning communities, free of charge.

In January 2025, Microlink continued to offer the programme free of charge to schools, investing time and capacity to engage with more schools and more partner organisations.

We present a summary of our achievements.

Engagement

Engagement Overview

Engagement across 2023–25 has steadily increased, with multiple cohorts and trusts participating. The breakdown below (highlighting the first half of 2025) illustrates the diversity and growing demand for the Be ThAT Teacher and Be ThAT TA offers:

Type	Dates (2025)	Attending
BTT (Be ThAT Teacher)	Jan to July 2025	59
SSAT (Schools, Students and Teachers) Cohorts	March to May 2025	16-30
BTTA (Be ThAT TA)	May to July 2025	25

The combined efforts have significantly exceeded the 100-school target set for 2023–24 and part of the HSBC project funding KPIs. Strong engagement has been observed particularly within one large trust and SSAT (Schools, Students and Teachers) networks, and the TA-specific course has gained early momentum.

Target: **100 schools** Actuals: **over 150 schools engaged**   **Target exceed by 50%**

Over 90 training, support and professional development sessions have been delivered to teachers in just over **150** school communities serving an estimated **55,000** children[10].

In terms of investment in change, this approximates to £1.18 per child.

---

[10] Estimate based on proportion of primary and secondary teachers engaged in training, and on govt figures for average primary and secondary school sizes

Impact on Staff AT Knowledge, Awareness and Application

The impact on participating staff has been profound. Many had **no knowledge** of the Assistive Technologies that were free and readily available on the existing Microsoft, Google and Apple systems they already had (a critical consideration given education budgetary constraints). Very few teachers had considered the use of AT in mainstream classrooms to make learning accessible. The **coaching** approach was welcomed, giving teachers the opportunity to discuss their individual challenges and needs, and create achievable and attainable improvement pathways for themselves and their schools as a result:

> **"This (has been) helpful in all senses. Love the approach – not just for the teach aspects, but your appreciation of obstacles in schools and support and resources for addressing. Thank you!"**

> **"Informative training and lots of food for thought – thank you!"**

> **"(The Coach) was inspiring. Any problems that were identified by any school, he gave realistic and encouraging feedback with the view that slow and steady is what will make AT durable and change school practice permanently. Thank you!"**

> **"This has been really valuable for us and the children are benefiting from this. Thank you!!"**

A quarter of participating schools have submitted detailed change management plans[11].

Impact on Children

The project team has been delighted to hear of immediate impact on children's attitude, motivation and access to learning:

> **"... the main quick win has been implementing speech-to-text for children in Years 4/5/6. The difference in their attitude to and enthusiasm towards writing has been brilliant to see. They are excited and feel as if doors have been opened to them! "**

This short video illustrates the impact on individual pupils in two primary settings:

---

[11] Data available on request

9
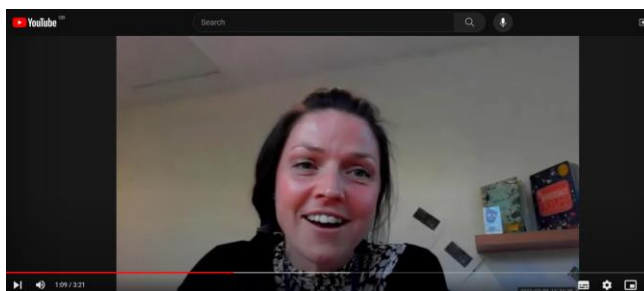
https://youtu.be/VXzJKX_pUHI

The response of a 9 yr-old boy with reading difficulties, frustrated because he was always slower than his peers, using text-to-speech for the first time:

"... oh my gosh it's reading it to me, this is amazing, this is the best thing ever, where can I get this, can I have it on my tablet at home..."

National Feedback Themes

Analysis of participant feedback highlighted the following key impact themes:

AI and Innovation
Participants expressed strong interest in learning more about AI and welcomed the opportunity to explore its application in education:

- "More input on AI and regular updates on new developments would be great."
- "How AI can support rather than replace TAs in school?"

Practical Application and CPD Cascade
Schools appreciated hands-on training and used the content to cascade knowledge internally:

- "I found the training extremely useful... all TAs received high quality resources and guidance."

Normalising Assistive Technology
Educators are using strategies learned to reduce stigma and promote wider use of AT:

- "Removing the stigma of using AT in lessons is the biggest barrier I have encountered to date."

Ongoing Support and Impact
Participants valued the ongoing support from the delivery team and noted lasting benefits:

- "We reached out to (our Coach)... he was very helpful and supportive."

10

Challenges Noted
Feedback highlighted consistent challenges including tech access, GCSE-appropriate tools, and teacher turnover. These have been shared with relevant partners to inform programme improvements.

Programme Endorsements

Participants strongly endorsed the programme's value:

- "Great programme that all schools need."
- "I am strongly convinced I want to be part of this program and contribute my knowledge to a good cause."

Case Studies of Practice

Parkgate Primary School (Coventry)
Adopted Microsoft Immersive Reader to support literacy across a high-SEND and EAL population. Created an internal AT team and began integrating tools across devices.

Prendergast Ladywell School (London)
Transitioned to a Google-based platform and piloted Helperbird to support EAL and SEND students. Developed a phased implementation plan with cross-department consistency.

Ricards Lodge High School (Merton)
Used Helperbird in Business and IT classes to support comprehension and independent learning. Planning to expand to other tools such as Sensory Scribe.

Newry Secondary School (Northern Ireland)
Piloted Immersive Reader and C-Pens to support literacy and assessment access. Prioritised stigma reduction and staff confidence building.

Reid Street Primary School (Darlington)
Focused on Year 6 through a Chromebook-based model. Embedded AT into Google Docs and class routines, improving both engagement and teacher confidence.

Scottish Primary School
Achieved Digital Schools Award and implemented Microsoft Reading Progress to support reading fluency. 80% of students showed improvement.

Alternative Provision (Sunderland)
Introduced iPads to support engagement and literacy through Immersive Reader, Seeing AI, and colour filters. Reported immediate impact on learner motivation.

Occupational Therapy Intervention (Secondary)
Used Dictation and Immersive Reader with a Year 7 student to reduce fatigue and promote independent writing. Exploring AI-based editing tools as a next step.

Additionally, fifteen school communities submitted detailed change management plans based on the Audit framework. A summary can be found in **Appendix 2**.

Quantitative Evaluation

Training Outcomes (2023–25) Survey responses showed (See **Appendix 1**):

- 100% of participants agreed or strongly agreed they now understand the benefits of AT.
- 100% reported increased awareness of available tools.
- 100% felt more confident using AT to support learning.
- 100% improved their knowledge and skills.
- 100% felt more confident supporting colleagues.

Demand for Future Training

- 69% of respondents requested access to the programme in 2025–26.
- 23% completed the training and wish to extend it to other staff.
- Only 8% expressed no further interest.

These metrics confirm both the immediate success and sustained demand for the programme.

Recommendations and Next Steps

- **Continue** regular training cycles, with **updated AI and AT content**.
- **Expand** shareable resources (videos, templates, case studies).
- Create a **community of practice** and **CPD network** for trained schools.
- **Improve technical support** guidance for implementation challenges, linked to the AI (Artificial Intelligence) imperatives recently announced by DfE (Department for Education)
- Explore **certification** or micro-credential self-study pathways for participants (**Be ThAT Teacher** as now earned **CDP Certification**).

Planning and opportunities into 2025-26

- Microlink extended the free HSBC-sponsored free training offer into the school year 2024-25, including delivering the training through partnerships with professional associations: Microlink underwrote staffing and coaching costs.
- Our contact book has grown to over 600 schools and academies
- In July 2025, a catalogue of services to schools and MATs has been developed, with entry costs deliberately kept as low as possible
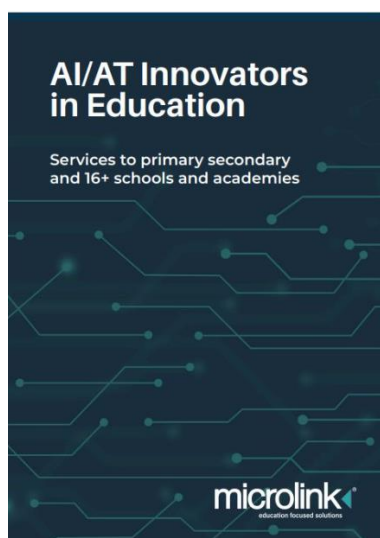
Download a copy HERE.

- Participants have asked for guidance regarding the introduction of **AI into Education establishments in England**. This has led to webinars, and the

development of on-line learning resources, such as **"Missing Pieces"**. Early release towards the end of July has been very well received.

- o [Missing Pieces: Helping you to put the AI jigsaw puzzle together for your learning community](#)

Conclusion

The Be ThAT Teacher programme is achieving tangible change across a wide range of educational settings. Through a combination of expert-led training, evidence-informed tools, and responsive support, it is empowering teachers and leaders to transform inclusion, engagement, and learner independence through technology.

The overwhelmingly positive feedback, compelling case studies, and clear demand for future access confirm that this programme is a vital part of the national strategy for equitable, tech-enabled education.

Acknowledgements

APPENDIX 1 Participant Survey Data

Images from participant surveys:

5. **If you completed all or part of our AT training 2023-25, could you please quickly give us some feedback:** Did the training, the notes and the session content help you: More details

● Strongly agree   ● Agree   ● Neither agree nor disagree   ● Disagree   ● Strongly disagree
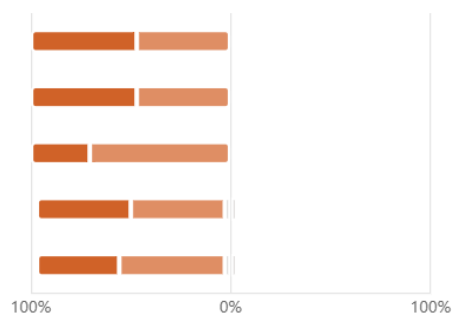

Understand the benefits of assistive technology (AT)?

Raise awareness of the AT that is available?

Give you more confidence in using AT to support learning?

Raise your levels of knowledge and skills of how AT could support learning and meet needs?

Confidence to support other staff to use AT in mainstream classrooms?

6. If you did **not** have the opportunity to complete the "Be ThAT Teacher" training programme in 2023-25 because of school factors (e.g. conflicting priorities, time pressures, etc.) **would you like another opportunity for you or other staff to access the programme in 2025-26**?   More details

● YES   18
● NO   2
● We completed the programme in 2023-25 but would
   like other teachers and leaders to access the...   6

23%   8%   69%

17
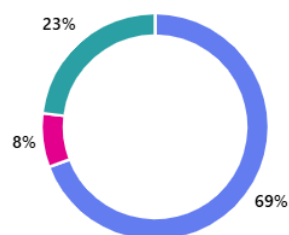
APPENDIX 2 Evaluation Report Summary from 15 school communities

15 school communities submitted detailed change management plans towards the end of the 2024-25 academic year. Presented here is a short summary of emerging themes.

Identifying Needs and Setting the Foundation

Across all schools, the decision to engage with AT stemmed from a shared recognition of persistent barriers to learning—particularly among students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), English as an Additional Language (EAL), and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Needs analyses, staff consultations, and learner observations consistently highlighted challenges in literacy, engagement, and independent access to the curriculum. Schools such as Reid Street Primary and Newark Primary identified disengagement and low reading fluency as key drivers, while others like Brentwood County High School used survey data to assess staff and student readiness for AT adoption.

Implementation and Early Impact

The programme catalysed a wide range of AT implementations, including Immersive Reader, Helperbird, Seeing AI, CPens, and voice dictation tools. Schools adopted phased rollouts, often starting with pilot groups or specific year levels. For example, Beacon of Light School used iPads and Immersive Reader to support reading accessibility, while Newark Primary leveraged Microsoft Teams' Reading Progress tool to track fluency and comprehension gains. Across the board, learners reported increased independence, engagement, and confidence—particularly when AT tools were integrated into daily classroom routines.

 Staff development was a critical enabler. Many schools, such as Chipping Warden Primary and Alderman Knight School, invested in CPD and peer-led training to build staff confidence. This not only improved implementation fidelity but also encouraged wider adoption. In some cases, such as at ACE Tiverton Special School, even a single student's success with AT (e.g., using Immersive Reader for proofreading) demonstrated the potential for scalable impact.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Despite the successes, schools encountered several challenges. Technical issues—ranging from outdated hardware to network restrictions—were common, particularly in early implementation phases. Environmental factors, such as lighting and device positioning, affected the accuracy of tools like Seeing AI. Moreover, stigma and inconsistent staff engagement emerged as barriers to sustained use, especially in

secondary settings.

A recurring lesson was the importance of a whole-school strategy. Schools that developed clear policies, such as Alderman Knight, or embedded AT into digital strategies, like Reid Street, reported smoother implementation and greater staff buy-in. The need for user-friendly tools, ongoing support, and time for learners to build familiarity was also emphasized.

Future Directions

Looking ahead, schools plan to expand AT use through structured rollouts, targeted interventions, and policy integration. Many are exploring additional tools, refining training programmes, and developing resource menus to ensure consistency. The programme has also inspired leadership development, with educators like those at Newark Primary and Brentwood County High School taking on strategic roles in digital inclusion.

Conclusion

The Be ThAT Teacher programme has significantly advanced the use of Assistive Technology in UK schools. By equipping educators with the tools, knowledge, and confidence to implement AT, it has laid the groundwork for more inclusive, equitable, and effective teaching and learning environments.