Developmental Assessment and Reporting
for Students with Additional Needs:
Getting Started

Assessment Research Centre
The University of Melbourne
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Getting Started with the SWANs Program

What are the SWANs materials?

The SWANs assessment materials are based on teachers’ observations of their students and the judgments they make about their students as learners. They cover the foundational or enabling learning skills of:

**Communication:**

The development of functional communication skills, leading towards the recognition and use of social conventions of communication. These are the skills a student needs to establish connection with other people.

**Interpersonal Learning:**

The development of skills to support social interaction, social responsibility and a capacity to transcend social difficulties. These are the skills a student needs to develop in order to learn with and from other people.

**Literacy:**

The development of the ability to use and interpret symbols such as pictures, letters, numbers, and text, leading towards early reading and writing.

**Personal Learning:**

The development of skills related to attention, memory, and executive functioning in school and classroom interactions.

**Emotional Self-Management:**

The development of understanding about the experience and expression of feelings in self and others.

**Foundational skills** are the enabling or general capabilities that all students need to establish, to the best of their ability, in order to engage in learning experiences.

The SWANs assessments allow a rich picture of a student’s strengths and abilities to be compiled and then used as a basis for planning and teaching.

They capture evidence of a student’s skills and understanding that can be gathered in the context of everyday school and classroom interactions, and upon which you can draw when planning a learning program you’re your students.

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You can draw together information from a range of sources when you answer the SWANs questions. For example, you may use a combination of the following sources.

- **Things you directly observe the student doing, saying, making, writing, or drawing while at school.**
- **Information about the student as a learner, gathered from other formal or informal assessments.**
- **The knowledge and understanding that others have about the student - including the student’s parents/carers, other teachers, therapy specialists, or support staff.**

To improve the quality of observation and judgment on which the SWANs assessments are based:

- **SWANs assessments should be completed by at least one teacher who has had time to get to know the student well.**
- **SWANs assessments can be completed by a teacher working alone, but working within a collegial group is even better.**
- **Moderation of observations and judgments helps teachers improve the accuracy and sensitivity of their responses to the SWANs questions.**
- **Working in partnership with another teacher when you first begin to use the SWANs assessments is one way to moderate judgments.**

**Logging in to the program**

When you open the SWANs program, you will be asked to identify your school system – Catholic, Government or Independent school.

Different school systems use slightly different versions of the program in terms of the way that student records are managed.

You will only be able to log in to the program via the system portal for which your school has been registered.

**Note:** The system can be run on iPads using a Flash compatible browser such as Puffin or iSwifter. These can be easily downloaded as apps, if you prefer to work in this mode.
After selecting your school system, you will need to log in to the program by entering your school number and password as identification. Your school number will have been sent to you with the link to the program.

As a default, the password is initially set as your school number.

After you log into the program, the home page appears (as illustrated below). Your school name should be shown at the top of the page.
Managing your school account

If you are a new user of the SWANs program, the first thing you should do is to change your password and share the new password with all SWANs users at your school. This will protect the security of your students’ assessment data. To do this, simply click on Manage Account from the main menu.

This will allow you to set a new password for your school and update the program records.
Managing student records

The Student Records button on the home page allows you to manage information about your student.

When you select this button, you will see the screen shown below:

From this screen, you can register new students for assessment, update details for an existing student, re-assign existing students to new classes (for example, at the start of each new school year), and check the status of your assessments. This allows you to check which students have complete assessments, which have partially complete assessments, and which students have yet to be assessed.

When you register a new student into the program, you will be asked to answer a few questions about the student.

You should enter the student’s identification details, and then assign the student to a class group. This is an important step.

Assigning students to class groups allows you to batch download student reports, which is very helpful if you have a large number of student records stored in the program. It also allows you to produce a combined Class Report for a group of students.

If you assign your students to a particular class and then change your mind about the way you have grouped students, you can easily re-assign them using the Re-Assign Classes button.

You can also assign students to a Graduated or similar class, to manage the records of students who are no longer attending your school.

Please note that a ‘class’ can be a group of students in either an actual or virtual classroom. The decision about how (or whether) to group students is entirely up to the school.

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Assessing students

When your students have been registered in the program, you can go ahead and select the Assessments menu button on the homepage. You should see a screen that looks like this:

When you select one of the five assessments, you will be presented with a list of registered students for your school or class. You should select the student for whom you wish to complete an assessment. This will take you to the assessment questions, which are presented one per screen.

Each assessment item should be answered by choosing the description that is the closest match to the student’s most typical behaviour when at school.

A student’s typical behaviour can be defined as:

- The skills the student can demonstrate when not upset, or unwell, or over-tired, or recovering from a period of ill health.
- The skills the student can demonstrate independently, unless support or prompting are specifically mentioned in the assessment question.
- The skills the student can demonstrate with the use of appropriate assistive materials, devices or technologies (e.g., corrective glasses, hearing aids, Braille, picture symbol systems, switches, and so on).
You should choose the option that is the **best match** to the student’s typical performance.

This means that you will need to make a judgment between options. Sometimes you may need to talk to other teachers who know the student well, or the student’s parents/carers, or observe or talk with the student, to make this judgment.

However, even if you later think you’ve made an **incorrect judgment** there is no need to be concerned. You should **simply go back** into the assessment program and **update your responses**. This will over-ride the previous assessment for the student.

As teachers, we often need to update our judgments about students in light of new information about their skills and understanding.

The options for each question are presented in order of difficulty or competence from the easiest shown at the top of the list. If a student is not yet able to demonstrate the first behaviour in each list of options, then the final and bracketed option should be selected. This allows you to note that the student is working towards, but has not yet achieved, any of the listed skills.

After each response, you should press <Next> to go to the next question. You will not be able to continue to the next question if you have not made a selection.

If you would like to go back to change a selection for a previous question, the <Previous> button can be used to reach the question you would like to edit. After updating your response, you can press <Next> (repeatedly if necessary) to continue to the next unanswered question.

There is a progress bar at the bottom of the screen to show which questions you have already answered (shaded in grey).

You will need to set aside around five to ten minutes at one sitting for each assessment and for each student.

If you do not complete all the questions in a single sitting, you will be able to return to complete them later. Simply use the progress bar at the bottom of the screen to see which questions you’ve completed and to pick up where you left off.

The main menu also provides access to an option that allows you to **check the status of your assessments** for a class. This is very useful if you have been interrupted while completing assessments, and are unsure which students still need to have assessments completed. You can reach this option via the **Student Records** menu button.

To submit any one of the assessment instruments, you need only press the <Submit> button that appears after the last question has been completed. This records the responses for that student, and returns you to the main menu. Then, if you wish, you can continue with another assessment for the same student, an assessment for another student or, alternatively, you can go to the **Reports** menu to view and download reports for the completed assessments.
**Downloading reports**

You can access student reports as soon as an assessment has been submitted.

You can produce reports by selecting the **Produce Reports** menu button from the main menu. This will take you to a page that allows you to choose the type of report you wish to download.

There are three types of report available in the system – individual student Rockets and Profiles and combined Class reports.

For example, if you wish to download a **Rocket Report** for your student, you will need to select the **Class group** (if you have organized your students into classes) and **Subject** from the drop down menus.

The assessment **Round** shown as a default is the current assessment round.

You can also use this option to access and download reports from earlier times when you have completed assessments for your student. These are stored in the program for you.

To learn more about the different types of reports, you should access the **Advice/Resources** section of the program, as described below.

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Learning more about SWANs

To learn more about the SWANs program, simply go to the Advice/Resources access button from the main menu.

Here you will find resources to help you explore the assessments and reports, plan a program for your student, and download the SWANs Learning Pathways. These are extended descriptions of the sorts of skills and behaviours that students at each level on the Rocket are typically ready to learn. An example of a Learning Pathway is shown below.
## An example Learning Pathway

The purpose of the SWANs assessment is to help you recognize the skills your student is ready to learn now, and to look ahead along a pathway of increasing skill and understanding to identify the sorts of skills the student is likely to be ready to learn next. This is important and useful information as you prepare an Individual Learning Plan or personalised learning program for your student. It helps you set specific and achievable goals for short- and long-term teaching and learning. The example shown below is the SWANs Literacy Pathway.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LITERACY</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level Seven</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Level Six</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Level Five</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Level Four</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Level Three</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Level Two</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Level One</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For example, if your student is working at Level Three on the Literacy Rocket s/he is typically learning to recognize letters and numbers. You can read the description for a student working at this skill level and, if you wish, use a highlighter to identify the specific skills your student demonstrates. An example is illustrated below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level Four</th>
<th>Learning to use letters, numbers, and pictures to communicate with others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The student is learning to recognise letter-sound relationships. S/he may name individual letters and identify their most common sounds, and name the sounds at the start and end of one-syllable words. S/he may seek clarification of word meaning and the correct form of words. The student is beginning to understand how writing should look, and that it has a consistent meaning. S/he may be able to identify spaces, letters and words in text, and recognise letters in their upper and lower case forms. S/he may be learning to predict the meaning of familiar words using partial cues (such as beginning letter and the shape of the word). The student may re-tell a familiar or favourite story in his/her own words.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Level Three</th>
<th>Learning to recognise letters and numbers</th>
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<td></td>
<td>The student is becoming aware of print in the environment, and may sort, match or identify letters and numbers. S/he may recognise some very familiar words by sight, and link these to basic needs or familiar people and activities. S/he may show interest in reading and writing, and be making choices about materials. The student may follow or point to a line of text as it is being read. S/he is learning to recognise the start and end of reading materials, may make linear scribbles that include repeated forms, or ‘write’ from left to right across a page. S/he may copy letters or simple words from models, and use pictures or symbols to re-tell a familiar story or message. The student may comment upon or point to illustrations in reading materials, or use these to predict the topic of reading materials.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Level Two</th>
<th>Exploring pictures, shapes, and sounds</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The student is learning to identify pictures, shapes and sounds. S/he may role play reading and writing, label images, draw non linear forms, or trace over some letter shapes and forms. The student may recognise his or her own name in print, perhaps using visual cues such as beginning letter or shape of the word. S/he may be learning to press keys on a computer keyboard and move a computer mouse.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To identify some appropriate learning goals for your student, you can highlight skills that s/he is ready to learn (as illustrated with the addition of green highlighting below). This could include skills at the student’s current level and, for additional challenge if this is appropriate in your judgment, skills at the immediate next level.

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Then, to think about ways to help your student achieve his or her learning goals, you can review and select from the **recommended teaching strategies** shown on the flip-side of the Rocket report.

In summary, the SWANs program has been designed as an integrated program of assessment, reporting, and advice for teachers. Its purpose is to support teachers as they build a rich understanding of their students as learners on an individual pathway towards achieving their full potential.

If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to contact us via email at **swans-plt@unimelb.edu.au**

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**Acknowledgments**

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