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State of Affairs

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Next week students return to school for another year and for our preps this can be an exciting but daunting experience.

My son Josh will be starting his first day of school, a day we will never forget.

Unfortunately, many families in the local area and across Victoria will find this time of year puts a lot of pressure on household expenses. After you factor in school fees, new school supplies like books, pens and pencils as well as school uniforms, sporting equipment and upcoming school excursions it can really add up.

It's particularly challenging for families with multiple kids heading back to school.

That forces some people to make some impossible decisions – like whether buying school supplies means not being able to pay the bills. It's vital that we give these families a helping hand.

That's why as Education Minister I made sure that there were programs in place to do just that. Over the last two years we have given 25,000 kids a free breakfast so they can concentrate properly at school.

Our Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund has helped 180,000 students take parts in camps and excursions. Meanwhile, we have provided 50,000 Victorian families more than 210,000 school uniform items under the Affordable School Uniforms Program over the past two years.

We are also set to provide 70,000 students with regular access to healthcare through the Doctors in Secondary School program – another expense that can pinch at this time of year.

No child should miss out on the complete school experience, whether they are starting prep or finishing high school. Every step is important and every year of development counts.

Last week I chatted to students at a secondary college who were getting news of their first round university of TAFE offers. They were thrilled to be moving on to the next stage of their lives and it was fantastic to talk to them about their plans. One student was off to study law at a prestigious university, others were set to take up a vocational trade.

These students wouldn't be in a position to embark on a chosen career if they hadn't received a strong education from prep to the last day of year 12. Every student deserves access to a high quality school with good facilities and bright, motivated teachers.

A reminder too for everyone – keep a close eye on the roads when walking or cycling to school. There is a 40 kilometre an hour zone covering all roads around our schools but you can never be too careful. So keep an eye out for each other, particularly younger students who may be walking or cycling to school for the first time. If you are dropping the kids off at school or just driving near a school during school hours remind to be extra careful.

Unfortunately, children and traffic just aren't a good mix. They are more easily distracted and have poor peripheral vision so keep a close eye out and slow down.

Good luck to all families with children returning to school, especially for those starting out at prep on their first day.