

# Media Release

**The Hon Ben Carroll MP**

Deputy Premier

Minister for Education

Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC



Wednesday, 21 January 2026

## FREE BOOKS FOR PREPS TO HELP FAMILIES WITH COST-OF-LIVING

The Allan Labor Government is delivering real cost-of-living relief to families and making the first day of school extra special with Preps at every government school to receive a free bundle of books and resources.

Minister for Education Ben Carroll today visited Gold Street Children's Centre – Keele Street Campus in Collingwood to present Prep Bags to some of the 52,400 children about to start at government primary, P-12, specialist and language schools.

The 2026 Prep Bags feature five free books selected by a panel of experts to spark a lifelong love of reading and lift every student's literacy and learning outcomes. Each Prep student will receive:

- *Chooks in Dinner Suits* – written by Diane Jackson Hill and illustrated by Craig Smith
- *Frank's Red Hat* – written and illustrated by Sean E Avery
- *Sharing* – written by Auntie Fay Muir and Sue Lawson and illustrated by Leanne Mulgo Watson
- *The Bin Monster* – written and illustrated by Annabelle Hale
- *The Concrete Garden* – written and illustrated by Bob Graham.

Inside their bags, Preps will also find a free holder for the new Youth myki to make accessing the Labor Government's free public transport for kids under 18 even easier for families.

The bags will contain a free jigsaw puzzle, an inclusive education poster with a colouring activity and activities from AFL Schools and Cricket Victoria. Each bag will contain a "welcome to school" message from Minister Carroll, an interactive toothbrushing chart from Oral Health Victoria and literacy and numeracy activities from VicHealth.

Students who are blind will receive the books in Braille, with tactile illustrations provided by the Statewide Vision Resource Centre, to make sure everyone can follow the stories.

The Prep Bags also contain resources help families access cost-of-living supports including free travel with the Youth myki and free health screening for Prep students. They also promote reading and learning through phonics, tips for creating healthy school lunchboxes and respectful behaviours in the school community.

Since 2019, the Labor Government's Books in Prep Bags initiative has provided more than 2.2 million books to Prep students and their families – making accessing high-quality books affordable for young Victorians.

### Quotes attributable to Minister for Education Ben Carroll

*"We know parents are doing it tough – that's why we're making sure no young Victorian misses out on accessing high-quality books to kickstart their love of reading."*

*"By giving Preps free books and activities to support them as they start their school journey, we're delivering practical cost-of-living relief that helps families from day one of school."*