



Dear [REDACTED]

On 17 May 2019, you emailed the Ministry requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, the following information:

- *How many back-to-school grants were given to families in Kaitaia in 2019?*
- *How many back-to-school grants were given to families in Kaitaia in 2018?*
- *What sort of things do these grants cover?*
- *Why is the demand for these grants so high?*
- *If they are different to the back-to-school grants, how many uniform loans were given to families in Kaitaia in 2019 and 2018?*

Your request for information about 'back-to-school grants' has been interpreted as referring to school related hardship assistance payments available to New Zealand families struggling to pay school costs. School related hardship assistance is granted through Advance Payments of Benefit (ADV) and Recoverable Assistance Payments (RAP).

Work and Income can assist families in receipt of a benefit with school-related costs through an ADV. ADVs are available to people who are in receipt of a main benefit and who require assistance to meet a particular immediate need for an essential item. All clients receiving a main benefit have access to an advance of up to 6 weeks of their net benefit entitlement.

Further information regarding ADV payment categories is available at: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/advance-payment-of-benefit/payment-categories-01.html.

Families not in receipt of a benefit can receive a RAP if they meet an income and asset test to determine their eligibility. RAPs are non-taxable, interest free, recoverable financial assistance to meet essential immediate needs for specific items or services.

Unless exceptional circumstances exist, when someone applies for hardship assistance for school related costs, the amount granted must not exceed the following for each dependent child:

- \$300 for school uniform
- \$200 for school stationary
- \$200 for School Administration Fees and/or Examination Fees

If the applicant requests an amount exceeding that which is specified above, the costs may need to be verified with the supplier.

Further information about school costs is available at:
www.workandincome.govt.nz/eligibility/children/school-costs.html#null.

Please note that all of these grants are recoverable, meaning they need to be repaid. The arrangement for the repayment of these grants depends on the individual's circumstances. The Ministry works with clients to negotiate a plan helping them clear debt as soon as possible without placing them in further hardship. For example, a client may arrange to pay back \$5 a week from their benefit.

Increasing living costs are placing more people in difficult positions and this is reflected in the rise in demand of all types of hardship grants across the country, including Kaitia.

The high numbers we are seeing in grants also reflect the efforts the Ministry has made to ensure people know where to access assistance to meet essential needs – to this end, the Ministry has made it easier for people to access school related grants through the Ministry's online system, MyMSD and over the phone, as well as in service centres. This year for the first time the Ministry started to grant school costs over the phone rather than requiring people to come into a service centre.

People still need to meet the same criteria for support and do what they can to improve their situation – however the Ministry are now ensuring the process doesn't slow things down when people require urgent assistance.

Please find enclosed a table showing the number of school related hardship grants, including amounts granted for school administration and examination fees, school stationery and school uniforms in Kaitia by quarter between 01 January 2018 and 31 March 2019.

In order to protect individuals' privacy, some values are suppressed and are represented by 'S'. The Ministry is unable to provide you with the exact number as releasing this information is likely to risk identifying the individuals concerned. As such, this information is withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act. The need to protect the privacy of these individuals outweighs any public interest in the information.

The principles and purposes of the Official Information Act 1982 under which you made your request are:

- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government,
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies and
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

This Ministry fully supports those principles and purposes. The Ministry therefore intends to make the information contained in this letter and any attached documents available to the wider public shortly. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter on the Ministry of Social Development's website. Your personal details will be deleted and the Ministry will not publish any information that would identify you as the person who requested the information.

If you wish to discuss school related hardship grants further with us, please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with this response, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cassandra Wise', with a small dot at the end.

Cassandra Wise
Manager, Issues Resolution, Service Delivery

School related hardship grants for Kaitaia between 1 January 2018 and 31 March 2019 by quarter.

Quarter Ending	School Administration Fees and Examination Fees		School Stationery		School Uniforms		Total	
	Number of Grants	Amount Granted	Number of Grants	Amount Granted	Number of Grants	Amount Granted	Number of Grants	Amount Granted
31 Mar 2018	S	\$90.00	S	\$2,799.42	133	\$31,767.78	170	\$34,657.20
30 Jun 2018	0	\$0.00	S	\$82.17	24	\$5,550.78	26	\$5,632.95
30 Sep 2018	S	\$330.00	S	\$97.00	S	\$2,775.87	18	\$3,202.87
31 Dec 2018	S	\$740.00	S	\$42.70	S	\$2,231.06	9	\$3,013.76
31 Mar 2019	6	\$2,842.00	29	\$9,589.43	57	\$13,233.82	92	\$25,665.25
Total	12	\$4,002.00	68	\$12,610.72	235	\$55,559.31	315	\$72,172.03

Notes:

- This data includes grants for School administration and examination fees, school stationery and school uniforms.
- School related grants are granted as Advance Payments of Benefit and Recoverable Assistance Payments.
- This is a count of grants. A client can have more than one grant in the period.
- In certain circumstances low numbers may potentially lead to individuals being identified. Due to these privacy concerns, numbers for some categories of clients have been suppressed or aggregated. Secondary suppression rules have also been applied when required. Suppressed numbers have been replaced by an 'S'