



29 APR 2019



Dear 

On 20 March 2019, you emailed the Ministry requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, the following information for the first two months of 2017, 2018, and 2019, broken down by year:

- *The total number of school uniform and stationery loans granted*
- *The sum of these loans*
- *The average amount granted*
- *For 2017 and 2018, the amount outstanding for loans that have not been repaid (broken down by year).*
- *Could you also please provide details of any changes to the criteria for accessing school uniform and stationery loans over these three years, and information on how beneficiaries repay these loans*

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. Please find attached a table that shows the total number and value of Hardship Grants for school stationery and uniforms during the first two months of 2017, 2018, and 2019.

If a client meets all qualifications, including meeting an income and asset test and having an immediate and essential need, a Recoverable Assistance Payment (RAP) can be made to assist with the cost of essential school stationery, generally up to \$200 per child. A RAP can also be made to purchase school uniforms, generally up to \$300 per child.

All clients receiving a main benefit have access to an advance of up to 6 weeks of their net benefit entitlement. An Advance Payment of Benefit can be made to assist with up to \$200 of school stationery costs and \$300 of school uniform costs.

RAPs are non-taxable, interest free, recoverable financial assistance to meet essential immediate needs for specific items or services.

Please note that all of these grants are recoverable. The arrangement for the repayment of these grants depends on the individual's circumstances. We work with our clients to negotiate a plan helping them clear debt as soon as possible without

placing them in further hardship, this could be an arrangement like paying back \$5 a week from their benefit.

The Ministry is unable to provide you with the amount of this recoverable assistance that has not been repaid to the Ministry as the debts of former clients of the Ministry are stored on a system which does not allow for the specific form of debt to be disaggregated. Similarly, the debt established for recipients of these grants who aren't in receipt of a main benefit is not centrally reported. As such, this part of your request is refused under section 18(g) of the Act.

No changes have been made to the eligibility criteria for Recoverable Assistance Payments for school uniforms or stationery during the past three years. As I noted above, we have made it easier this year for people to access this kind of help over the phone, which is likely to have resulted in the increased number of applications.

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 available to the wider public shortly. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter 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 this response with us, please feel free to contact [OIA\\_Requests@msd.govt.nz](mailto: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](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely



Cassandra Wise

**Manager, Issue Resolution Team, Service Delivery**

Table 1: The number and value of Hardship Assistance Payments for school stationary and school uniforms during January and February of 2017, 2018, and 2019.

Year Granted	Month Granted	Hardship Assistance Type					
		School Stationary			School Uniforms		
		Number of Grants	Amount Granted	Average Amount Granted	Number of Grants	Amount Granted	Average Amount Granted
2017	Jan-17	3,654	\$437,467.00	\$119.72	8,325	\$2,268,787.10	\$272.53
	Feb-17	4,056	\$491,004.21	\$121.06	6,342	\$1,553,221.31	\$244.91
2018	Jan-18	3,913	\$487,962.10	\$124.70	8,480	\$2,385,234.37	\$281.28
	Feb-18	3,703	\$444,587.15	\$120.06	5,808	\$1,436,600.01	\$247.35
2019	Jan-19	8,741	\$1,208,266.62	\$138.23	15,703	\$4,730,754.55	\$301.26
	Feb-19	6,476	\$904,679.08	\$139.70	8,247	\$2,125,509.68	\$257.73