



MANA MOKOPUNA
Children's Commissioner

Te Whārau o Tairāwhiti Remand Home

OPCAT Monitoring Report

Visit date: April 2026

Report date: July 2026

Kia kuru pounamu te rongō

All mokopuna* live their best lives

✱

Drawing from the wisdom of Te Ao Māori, we have adopted the term mokopuna to describe all children and young people we advocate for, aged under 18 years of age in Aotearoa New Zealand. This acknowledges the special status held by mokopuna in their families, whānau, hapū and iwi and reflects that in all we do. Referring to the people we advocate for as mokopuna draws them closer to us and reminds us that who they are, and where they come from matters for their identity, belonging and well-being, at every stage of their lives.

Please note for clarity, in this report, we use the term 'mokopuna' to describe a group of children and young people, and tamaiti for a specific child or young person.

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Introduction

The role of Mana Mokopuna

Mana Mokopuna – Children’s Commissioner (Mana Mokopuna) is an independent advocate for all children and young people (mokopuna) under the age of 18 and for those who are care-experienced, under the age of 25. Mana Mokopuna advocates for children’s rights to be recognised and upheld, provides advice and guidance to government and other agencies, advocates for system-level changes, and ensures children’s voices are heard in decisions that affect them.

Our organisation is one of five bodies¹ designated as the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) in Aotearoa New Zealand as per the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT).

The New Zealand legislation relating to OPCAT is contained in the Crimes of Torture Act 1989. The role of the NPM is to visit places where people are deprived of their liberty. For Mana Mokopuna, this means:

- Kōrero (talk) with mokopuna to understand their care experiences living in a facility from which they cannot freely leave.
- Engaging with kaimahi (staff) and other professionals working in facilities to understand the highlights, challenges and barriers in relation to the care and treatment experienced by mokopuna and their whānau.
- Making recommendations aimed at strengthening protections, improving treatment and conditions, and preventing torture, cruel, inhuman, degrading treatment or punishment both at system and facility levels.

About this report

This report presents the findings from our OPCAT Monitoring visit and sets out recommended actions to address any identified concerns. It outlines the quality of the lived experience of mokopuna within the facility and provides evidence to support our findings, drawing on information gathered before, during, and after the visit.

Our analysis is guided by the *Mana Mokopuna – Assessment and Engagement Framework*. This framework shapes not only what we assess, but how we engage, interpret, and respond to what we observe. It provides a values-based lens grounded in te ao Māori, ensuring that monitoring centres the rights, dignity, and inherent mana of mokopuna. The Framework is underpinned by six interconnected Mātāpono: *whakapapa*, *whānaungatanga*, *aroha*, *rangatiratanga*, *kaitiakitanga*, and *mātauranga*. These Mātāpono operate alongside the

¹ The NPM in Aotearoa New Zealand is coordinated centrally by Kahui Tika Tangata - the Human Rights Commission, and comprises of Mana Mokopuna, The Ombudsman, the Independent Police Conduct Authority and the Inspector of Service Penal Establishments.

OPCAT domains² and strengthen our monitoring approach by embedding Māori beliefs, relational worldviews, and collective social structures into our analysis.

At the heart of the Framework is the concept of mana. Mana reflects the inherent dignity, authority, worth, and potential of every mokopuna. Mokopuna are born with mana and it cannot be diminished or removed. Within the Mana Mokopuna Framework, recognising mana means affirming that mokopuna are entitled to the same respect, care, and protection as adults, and that their voices, identities, and aspirations must be upheld in all settings at all times, including where they are deprived of their liberty.

The Mātāpono articulate what mokopuna require to thrive and realise their full potential. They provide a culturally grounded foundation for assessing treatment, care, safety, participation, identity, and daily experience. Rather than functioning as abstract principles, the Mātāpono guide our OPCAT Monitoring inquiry, inform our interpretation of evidence, and shape the way we determine whether environments actively uphold or undermine the mana of mokopuna.

The Mana Mokopuna Framework reflects and expands upon the principles of whakapapa, whānaungatanga, and mana tamaiti in the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989, as well as the rights affirmed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. It strengthens our ability to assess compliance with international and domestic human rights obligations while remaining firmly grounded in te ao Māori.

We are currently revitalising and embedding the *Mana Mokopuna – Assessment and Engagement Framework* across our OPCAT monitoring practice. Its initial application is focused on iwi and kaupapa Māori-run remand homes, with the intention of progressively expanding its use across all areas of our NPM designation. Each Mātāpono is briefly defined in this report to support clarity for readers.

About this visit

Mana Mokopuna conducted an announced visit to Te Whārau o Tairāwhiti Remand Home (Te Whārau) as part of its NPM monitoring visit programme. The objective of our OPCAT Monitoring as a NPM is to prevent ill-treatment in all places where mokopuna are deprived of their liberty by regularly monitoring and assessing the standard of care experienced in these facilities.

Te Whārau Remand Home supports the needs of mokopuna remanded into youth justice custodial care for an average of six weeks, by providing a safe, nurturing environment close to whānau and the community.

² The six domains outlined in the guidance for National Preventative Mechanisms [Monitoring Places of Detention - A practical guide](#) with the addition of a domestic domain 'Improving Outcomes for Mokopuna Māori.' For the purposes of our OPCAT NPM Monitoring in Aotearoa.

About this facility

Facility Name:	Te Whārau o Tairāwhiti Remand Home (Operated by Tūranga Social Services a social service arm of Te Rūnanga o Tūrangānui a Kiwa).
Region:	Te Tairāwhiti (Gisborne)
Operating capacity:	3 Beds form mokopuna tāne. The whare is leased from Kāinga Ora and funding for service is contracted with Oranga Tamariki. The whare consists of three bedrooms for mokopuna and dedicated mokopuna bathrooms. There is a separate area where kaimahi can take breaks and sleep when there is a live-in caregiver. There is a large lounge with TV, books and board games available for mokopuna. This leads to a large kitchen/ dining area. Outside there is a classroom and garage used for mokopuna activities (like carving and screen printing). There is a large, grassed lawn and māra kai from which produce is used for whare meals. Kaimahi have access to a whare van so that mokopuna and kaimahi can engage in activities based in the community. There was one tamaiti living in the whare at the time of this April 2026 OPCAT Monitoring visit.
Status under which mokopuna are detained: s238(1)(d) of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989.	

Key Findings

Mana Mokopuna found no evidence of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment (ill-treatment) during the visit to Te Whārau o Tairāwhiti Remand Home.

Mana Mokopuna report the following findings:

Areas of strength:

- Tūranga is central to the model of care at the whare. It shapes the collective aspiration toward equity, strength, learning, growth, and future-focused outcomes for mokopuna and their whānau.
 - High quality practice policies and guidance documents support kaimahi working in the whare to provide safe, relational, and culturally responsive care and treatment for mokopuna.
 - Kaimahi are effective in building trust with mokopuna through relational, trauma-informed care.
- The majority of kaimahi working in the whare whakapapa Māori and are mana whenua. Kaimahi strengthened mokopuna knowledge of their cultural identity by sharing their

whakaaro and mātauranga Māori, supporting mokopuna to learn their pepeha and showing them the value of mahi toi.

- Kaimahi were strong in their desire to be role models for mokopuna and support them with their whakapapa journey, ensuring mokopuna learn practical life skills for when they leave the whare.
- There is ample opportunity for mokopuna to be rangatira (leaders) in their care at Te Whārau and mokopuna said they felt comfortable sharing their ideas and suggestions with kaimahi.
- Education is culturally grounded and strengths based.
 - Mokopuna are able to have in-put into what they learn during their time at Te Whārau, aligning education to their current interests.
- Kaimahi feel supported by their management team and feel their training supports them to work well with mokopuna.

Areas for improvement:

- Continuous learning and practice reminders are needed to limit complacency and keep practice consistent. Practice reminders include:
 - Keeping line of sight of mokopuna at all times.
 - Ensuring the office door is closed and locked when kaimahi are not using the room.
 - Kaimahi phones were sometimes left in common areas unattended.
- Systemically, there continues to be issues with Oranga Tamariki site social worker engagement with mokopuna who come through the whare.
 - Mana Mokopuna were provided with examples around a lack of social worker engagement with mokopuna on their caseloads including mandatory check-ins, attendance at key hui like Family Group Conferences, and court hearings.
 - Mokopuna All About Me Plans often lack detail when mokopuna are admitted into the whare. By contrast the Oranga Ake Plans developed by Te Whārau are rich in information and provide excellent guidance for how kaimahi can engage and care for mokopuna.
- Systemically, the Oranga Tamariki Placement Team needs to strengthen communication with all remand whare so that kaimahi are aware of personnel changes and new reporting requirements or changes.

Recommendations

2025 Systemic Recommendations made to Oranga Tamariki National Office

	Recommendation
1	Ensure their site social workers adhere to internal policies regarding contact with mokopuna ³ and ensure comprehensive information is relayed to service providers who are charged with the daily care of mokopuna at the point of admission.
2	The Oranga Tamariki Placement Team need to re-establish and strengthen their relationship with remand homes given recent personnel changes. Communications need to be clear on what mandatory reporting is required.

2025 Facility Recommendations made to Tūranga Social Services

	Recommendation
1	Continue working to upskill kaimahi on practice basics to avoid complacency when caring for mokopuna.
2	Tūranga Social Services purchase shift cell phones to remove the need for kaimahi to use personal devices for mahi.

Concluding Observations from the United Nations

In February 2023, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child ('the UN Committee') released its Concluding Observations⁴ for New Zealand's sixth periodic review on its implementation of the Children's Convention⁵ and how the Government is protecting and advancing the rights of mokopuna in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In August 2023, the United Nations Committee Against Torture also released Concluding Observations⁶ for New Zealand's seventh periodic review regarding the implementation of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment⁷.

³ [Allocating a key worker and co-worker | Practice Centre | Oranga Tamariki](#)

⁴ Refer CRC/C/NZL/CO/6 [G2302344 \(3\).pdf](#)

⁵ [Convention on the Rights of the Child | OHCHR](#)

⁶ Refer CAT/C/NZL/CO/7 [G2315464.pdf](#)

⁷ [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment | OHCHR](#)

There continues to be significant work required by agencies (State and non-State organisations) that are responsible for detaining and depriving children and young people of their liberty, to ensure that their practice and work is in this context is, in all respects, consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the recommendations of both the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the UN Committee Against Torture. We draw both sets of recommendations to all agencies and entities responsible for the care of mokopuna, including in secure care facilities and whare.

Whakapapa



Whakapapa acknowledges and reminds us of where we come from, our heritage, history, and the generations we descend from. It reflects the unbroken chain of whānau, blood, and birth that connects us to those who came before and shapes who we are today.

Tūranga is the heartbeat of the model of care in the whare

Te Whārau o Tairāwhiti Remand Home is a community-based remand home operating under Tūranga Social Services⁸, an arm of Te Rūnanga o Tūranganui a Kiwa⁹. The whare provides youth justice placements for mokopuna remanded by the Youth Court into the custody of Oranga Tamariki, generally for a period of up to six weeks. During this time, there is a strong emphasis on maintaining connection to whānau, whakapapa, whenua, and community for mokopuna and at the centre of whare operations is the whakatāuki:

Tūranga Tangata Rite

Tūranga Makaurau

Tūranga Ararau

Tūranga a Mua

This whakatāuki along with “*Hoki mai o tātou mokopuna, ki ō tātou pito whānau mai*” - “Bring our children back to their home, their place of descent” attributed to Heeni Sunderland (2002), reflects the collective aspiration toward equity, strength, learning, growth, and future-focused outcomes for mokopuna and their whānau. It has shaped the direction of Te Rūnanga o Tūranganui a Kiwa since its establishment in 1986 and continues to underpin the collective priorities for ngā iwi e toru ki Tūranganui a Kiwa which are:

- Ngāi Tamanuhiri¹⁰
- Rongowhakaata¹¹
- Te Aitanga a Māhaki¹²

Throughout this April 2026 OPCAT Monitoring visit, Tūranga was consistently identified by kaimahi as the foundation underpinning what good care looks like in the whare. The OPCAT Monitoring team observed this framework being used throughout every day. We saw how the framework was brought to life by using visual reminders on a central whiteboard in the lounge which clearly set out daily routines, aspirations and goals for both kaimahi and mokopuna and incorporated practice reminders for kaimahi that uphold the mana of the mokopuna they are working for and supporting. The Tūranga Social Services Manager and kaimahi described how the framework provides a shared set of values and expectations that guide decision-making, accountability, relationships and support for mokopuna. Observations made during this April 2026 OPCAT Monitoring visit indicated that Tūranga was not simply a framework on paper but

⁸ [Tūranga Social Services :: Te Runanga o Turanganui a Kiwa](#)

⁹ [Te Runanga o Turanganui a Kiwa](#)

¹⁰ [Ngāi Tamanuhiri :: Te Runanga o Turanganui a Kiwa](#)

¹¹ [Rongowhakaata :: Te Runanga o Turanganui a Kiwa](#)

¹² [Te Aitanga a Mahaki :: Te Runanga o Turanganui a Kiwa](#)

was actively reflected in day-to-day practice and contributed to creating a culturally grounded, strengths-based approach that embeds whakapapa, equity, learning, whānaungatanga, and mokopuna voice into the daily operation of the whare.



Lounge with whiteboard

Practice guidance promotes trauma-informed care for mokopuna

High quality practice policies and guidance documents support kaimahi working in the whare to provide safe, relational, and culturally responsive care for mokopuna while they are staying away from their whānau. The documents and policies the OPCAT Monitoring team reviewed promoted practice consistency across all shift teams and we could see how kaimahi used them to tailor care and activities to individual tamaiti.

Practice fundamentals were outlined as follows:

- Tūranga a Muri recognised the historical experiences, trauma, and cultural identity of rangatahi and whānau through holistic and trauma-informed approaches.
- Tūranga a Mua focused on future aspirations, restorative practice, education, and meaningful pathways forward.
- Tūranga Makaurau emphasised the strengths, capabilities, and aspirations of rangatahi, whānau, and kaimahi.
- Tūranga Ararau promoted continuous learning, knowledge-sharing, rangatahi voice, and rights-based practice.
- Tūranga Tangata Rite reinforced fairness, equity, accountability, and culturally responsive care, including restorative approaches that look to repair harm and strengthen relationships.

There is clear emphasis from kaimahi to ensure mokopuna are supported in ways that uphold their mana, connection, participation, and wellbeing when they stay at Te Whārau. The OPCAT

Monitoring team commends this practice approach and the way it upholds the mana and rights of mokopuna living in the whare.

Strengthening mokopuna identity through whakapapa

All manuhiri are welcomed to the whare with mihi whakatau and mokopuna are supported to participate fully. Kaimahi role model what is expected by confidently speaking reo Māori, sharing their pepeha, leading waiata tautoko and finishing the formal process with karakia. This process created space for mokopuna to be included that upheld their mana, strengthened connection through whakawhānaungatanga and reinforced a sense of belonging within the whare. Mokopuna stood confidently to share their pepeha which was thoughtfully written on a whiteboard so that mokopuna could refer to it should they need it for reference.

The majority of kaimahi working at Te Whārau whakapapa to Te Tairāwhiti bringing authentic lived connection to the rohe¹³ and surrounding communities. This contributed to a practice environment where cultural knowledge was not simply taught as theory, but lived and reinforced through everyday relationships, language, values, and interactions. Kaimahi showed an ability to engage mokopuna in culturally meaningful ways that reflected shared understanding and connection. One example observed during this April 2026 OPCAT Monitoring visit included kaimahi sharing their skills and supporting mokopuna with carving and cultural expression. This kaimahi was a well-known carver in the rohe and was currently working on carving for various marae across Te Tairāwhiti. The kaimahi was not only showing te tamaiti how to carve, but how that skill can be translated into giving back to community spaces and how important and powerful mahi toi can be. These approaches reflected a strengths-based and relational model of care where whakapapa, identity, and cultural belonging were actively used to build-up and grow the breadth of mokopuna pro-social experiences.

He whare tiaki, He mokopuna ora – A whare that reflects care

The physical environment at Te Whārau o Tairāwhiti Remand Home reflected visible pride, care, and protection by kaimahi and mokopuna. Despite the whare being more than 90 years old, the OPCAT Monitoring team saw how the whare was well maintained, respected, and cared for which contributed to establishing a warm environment for mokopuna.



(left) the outside of the whare, (right) the central lounge area used as the hub for the whare.

¹³ [rohe - Te Aka Māori Dictionary](#)

However, several longer-term challenges regarding the suitability of the whare were identified. These included poor line of sight between the kitchen and education spaces, limited space available for caregivers and kaimahi to take breaks, and the on-going challenges associated with ageing infrastructure. Although these limitations were evident, kaimahi said the condition of the whare reflected a responsibility they have to keep the environment homely and reinforce to mokopuna that the whare is more than a placement setting for them, but a space where mana, wellbeing, and belonging are actively upheld. Positive relationships between Tūranga Social Services, Kāinga Ora, and Oranga Tamariki were also described positively with all three agencies working well together to enable Te Whārau o Tairāwhiti Remand Home to remain with the current lease until mid-2027.

The Oranga Tamariki Property Team reinforced the level of care invested into the environment by Tūranga Social Services. Between 2025 and 2026, 14 maintenance¹⁴ jobs were identified for the whare with the main damage by mokopuna being latches on bedroom windows being broken. There is no tagging or other physical damage recorded by mokopuna which the Oranga Tamariki Property team said is significantly lower than maintenance fixes required for other remand homes across the motu (country). The Oranga Tamariki Property Team acknowledged the high standard of upkeep and the respect shown toward the physical environment at Te Whārau was exceptional. During this April 2026 OPCAT Monitoring visit, te tamaiti was observed contributing to cleaning responsibilities and general chores and helping with meal preparation and table setting without being told, contributing to a positive atmosphere that encouraged shared responsibility.



Resources for mokopuna (left) books and guitars in the lounge, (centre) boxing bag and basketball hoop outside, (right) table tennis and exercise equipment in the garage.

¹⁴ Data received from Oranga Tamariki Homes and Work Environments | Infrastructure 10 April 2026

Whānaungatanga



Whānaungatanga is the practice of building and nurturing meaningful relationships. It ensures mokopuna feel a sense of belonging, connection, and support within their whānau, hapū, and communities.

Building trust through consistent practice

The OPCAT Monitoring team saw how kaimahi and mokopuna relationships were grounded in trust and genuine connection which was identified by the Monitoring team as a strength at Te Whārau o Tairāwhiti Remand Home. Kaimahi consistently invested time engaging with mokopuna, recognising that trust and connection are foundations for effective care. During this visit, the OPCAT Monitoring team observed all kaimahi regularly checking in with te tamaiti throughout the day to ensure they were informed, supported and emotionally settled. At the same time kaimahi were aware of balancing supervision with the need for te tamaiti to have personal space. Kaimahi skilfully provided te tamaiti with opportunities to spend time independently watching tv or helping themselves to kai while remaining within appropriate, but unobtrusive, line of sight. Interactions between kaimahi and te tamaiti observed by the OPCAT Monitoring team appeared relaxed, respectful and caring and te tamaiti said they felt comfortable and connected with how things are run in the whare.

The whare Leadership Team also fostered a supportive and collaborative team culture that reinforced relationship-based approaches to practice. Kaimahi shared that the Tūranga Social Services Manager regularly visits the whare multiple times per week, maintaining active, on-site support for both kaimahi and mokopuna. Kaimahi working in the whare meet fortnightly as a team and told the OPCAT Monitoring team that this intentional time further supported keeping whare tikanga consistent, and an opportunity for kaimahi to strengthen practice, communication, reflection, and team connection. Kaimahi used the way the Manager had prepared kaimahi for our announced April 2026 OPCAT Monitoring visit as an example of taking the time and care to ensure kaimahi knew what to expect and had a chance to ask any questions before the Monitoring team were on-site. Kaimahi described feeling nervous at the prospect of the visit, but after the sessions with their Manager felt prepared and confident that the visit would go well and they could showcase how they support mokopuna well.

There is a clear commitment from kaimahi at all levels to get to know each other well, to share practice insights and to provide the very best environment possible for mokopuna who stay in the whare. Kaimahi say they trust each other and the OPCAT Monitoring team saw how that trust and confidence spreads to mokopuna enabling them to make the most of the opportunities kaimahi can offer, if they chose to.

Relationships and role modelling

The strength of relationships between kaimahi and mokopuna was highlighted by te tamaiti during this April 2026 OPCAT Monitoring visit. Mokopuna described feeling respected, valued, and supported by kaimahi.

"I reckon all of them (kaimahi) are mean."

(Mokopuna)

Kaimahi intentionally supported mokopuna to participate in the everyday life of the whare and were constantly role-modelling what pro-social interactions look like, with good banter, laughing, and sharing knowledge whilst at the same time getting the jobs done. One kaimahi shared that a big focus is on ensuring mokopuna left the whare with practical skills, values, and experiences that would support them beyond their placement. Mokopuna were encouraged to contribute to the running of the whare through meal planning, grocery shopping, food preparation, cleaning, and other household responsibilities. These opportunities provided practical life-skills and an understanding of the realities faced by many whānau, including the pressures associated with the rising cost of living and making a budget stretch.

"Just want to give rangatahi some skills while they are living in the whare"

(Kaimahi)

Kaimahi said the aim was to ensure mokopuna left with more than what they arrived with, emphasising the importance of kindness, respect, and passing on values that could support positive futures. Kaimahi spoke about encouraging mokopuna to consider their aspirations and opportunities beyond their current circumstances, while guiding them to understand the steps required to achieve these goals. This strengths-based approach reflected a genuine commitment to help mokopuna recognise their potential and develop confidence in the possibilities available to them.

Daily routines provided structure, consistency, and opportunities for on-going connection throughout the day. A large whiteboard was centrally located within the lounge of the whare outlining wā karakia, tikanga of the whare, notices, hauora check-ins, the Tūranga model, and daily plans. This supported transparency and understanding for both kaimahi and mokopuna, while regular communication and engagement from kaimahi helped maintain connection and participation. The whiteboard not only reinforced the model of care and whare values, but also helped to create an environment where mokopuna understood expectations, remained connected to the daily rhythm of the whare, and experienced flexibility when individual needs or circumstances changed.

Maintaining connections with whānau

Connection with whānau was described as an important part of care within Te Whārau o Tairāwhiti Remand Home. Kaimahi actively supported communication and engagement with whānau despite challenges associated with short stays in the whare, mokopuna being placed far from home, and geographical barriers across the Tairāwhiti region. Phone calls were

regularly facilitated and supported by kaimahi, with mokopuna calls lasting between 20 to 30 minutes.

"Out of all the places he has been to, this is the best place for him to be in,"

(Whānau)

Kōrero with whānau centred around their appreciation for the care and support provided within the whare. One whānau member shared *"Kaimahi are great with him"*. Whānau feedback aligned with Mana Mokopuna observations that consistency, and culturally grounded relationships were central to upholding the wellbeing of mokopuna and kaimahi provide high quality care and treatment.

Rangatiratanga



Rangatiratanga is about recognizing and supporting mokopuna to have a voice, choice, and agency. It affirms their right to influence decisions that affect them and to live with dignity and self-determination.

Mokopuna voice and participation

Advocating for mokopuna to exercise choice, contribute to decision-making and have their opinions not only heard, but actioned, was observed within Te Whārau. The OPCAT Monitoring team saw how daily planning processes and hauora check-ins provided regular opportunities for mokopuna to express how they were feeling and contribute to decisions about the day ahead. Kaimahi shared that hauora check-ins are done at both the beginning and end of the day enabling kaimahi to respond to changing wellbeing needs and adjust support accordingly. This approach strengthened mokopuna participation by ensuring they were not only informed but also able to influence decisions that affected them. For example, when a scheduled Muay Thai boxing activity was unavailable, an alternative gym activity and pool recovery session was organised instead. Te tamaiti chose to participate in the gym session only as he did not want to go to the pool that day. Kaimahi adjusted the plan for te tamaiti to balance structure with individual needs ensuring mokopuna experience both consistency and responsiveness within the care environment.

Kaimahi demonstrated a commitment to keeping mokopuna informed of updates and decisions that impacted them, supporting transparency and helping mokopuna understand what was happening around them and why. The OPCAT Monitoring team saw how kaimahi navigated feelings of agitation regarding an up-coming bail hearing for te tamaiti, by calmly walking them through the process and outlining all possible outcomes, not just the one mokopuna and their whānau were expecting. Kaimahi saw value in sharing the full extent of the information with mokopuna, involving their Oranga Tamariki site social worker, so that they could be ready for their hearing and ask questions in a safe place before heading to Court. Te tamaiti was visibly happier knowing how things at court could go for them and was grateful for the information from kaimahi.

Mokopuna have a right to know what is happening with their care plans and how processes like court appearances will go. The OPCAT Monitoring team was pleased to see how kaimahi navigated this with te tamaiti, effectively de-escalating heightened mokopuna behaviours by providing relevant information in a way te tamaiti could understand.

Supporting positive decision making

Throughout this April 2026 OPCAT Monitoring visit kaimahi demonstrated a calm, relational and strengths-based approach when responding to moments of frustration, disappointment or emotional distress. Rather than focusing solely on behaviour, kaimahi made the effort to

understand the underlying emotions and circumstances influencing mokopuna, creating opportunities for positive decision-making. One example involved te tamaiti becoming visibly upset following a difficult phone call. Kaimahi responded promptly by taking mokopuna out of the whare and engaging in a calm and supportive kōrero while providing space for the mokopuna to process their emotions. Kaimahi supported mokopuna to regain composure and re-engage positively with the activities and routines of the whare. Te tamaiti shared with the OPCAT Monitoring team the following day, that after the phone call having space to kōrero with kaimahi helped them to feel better.

Kaimahi show commitment to supporting mokopuna through challenging moments in ways that strengthen emotional regulation and promote positive coping strategies rather than punitive responses.

Oranga Ake plans support mokopuna transitions

Supporting mokopuna to transition successfully back into their whānau, hāpori, and future pathways is a clear focus of practice at Te Whārau. Throughout this April 2026 OPCAT Monitoring visit, the leadership team and kaimahi described an intentional approach that ensures mokopuna left the whare with a sense of achievement, strengthened aspirations, and practical opportunities to support their next steps. Kaimahi showed a future-focused approach that extended beyond mokopuna immediate care needs and considered the long-term wellbeing and success of mokopuna after their stay in the whare. Central to this approach were Te Whārau o Tairāwhiti Oranga Ake plans, which include:

- Identity and cultural needs
- Connections with whānau
- Safety concerns
- Behavioural needs
- Recreational needs
- Emotional needs
- Educational needs

These plans are written with mokopuna by the kaiako of Te Whārau during their placement in the whare. Rather than focusing on risks or deficits, planning processes build on existing strengths while creating opportunities for growth, learning, and achievement. The plans then support kaimahi to work alongside mokopuna to identify meaningful goals and connect them with opportunities that align with their interests, strengths, and future aspirations. Te tamaiti shared with Mana Mokopuna that achieving their worksite safety certificate, practicing and preparing to sit their driver licence, prepare for employment and explore career pathways linked to their own communities and areas of interest was something they were proud of whilst staying in the whare.

Kaimahi also played an active role in supporting mokopuna to engage with a range of external services. The OPCAT Monitoring team saw how kaimahi connected te tamaiti to tutors at a course in their home community to kōrero and understand how te tamaiti can re-engage once

his time on remand had finished. Kaimahi are aware that mokopuna placements within the whare can be short, so kaimahi make a collective effort to equip mokopuna with the skills and confidence to transition well into the next stage in their life.

A positive relationship with VOYCE Whakarongo Mai

We heard from both VOYCE Whakarongo Mai¹⁵ and Te Whārau kaimahi that their relationship is positive, collaborative and continues to strengthen independent advocacy for mokopuna. Te Whārau kaimahi said that the two agencies communicate openly, share information and work together in ways that support the rights of mokopuna. The Kaiarahi of VOYCE Whakarongo Mai acknowledged the responsiveness of whare kaimahi noting a shared commitment to ensuring mokopuna remained informed, supported, and connected to advocacy when required. The OPCAT Monitoring team saw information for mokopuna displayed throughout the whare on how to contact VOYCE Whakarongo Mai and there was information given to mokopuna on admission in their admission pack.

Alongside these strengths, VOYCE Whakarongo Mai identified several broader challenges impacting the experiences of mokopuna placed at Te Whārau. These challenges were not specific to the whare itself but reflected wider systemic and regional factors. Concerns included delays within judicial processes, resulting in uncertainty and prolonged periods of remand for some mokopuna. VOYCE Whakarongo Mai also shared that mokopuna often tell them they feel isolated when placed away from home and whānau.

While these challenges remain largely outside the direct influence of Tūranga Social Service, they provide context for understanding the experiences of mokopuna within Te Whārau. The OPCAT Monitoring team encourages kaimahi at Te Whārau to continue supporting and facilitating mokopuna to connect back to services and supports when they are placed far from home and to continue building on mokopuna strengths, so they are empowered to stand in their rangatiratanga and make informed decisions about their future.

¹⁵ [Home - VOYCE - WHAKARONGO MAI](#)

Kaitiakitanga



Kaitiakitanga is the responsibility to protect, care for, and sustain the wellbeing of mokopuna and their environment. It calls us to act as guardians, ensuring safe places and futures for mokopuna.

Systemic and regional service pressures impact mokopuna

During this April 2026 OPCAT Monitoring visit, we heard from external agencies that broader regional service pressures are impacting the continuity of support for mokopuna across Te Tairāwhiti. Workforce shortages were reported across key services, including Police (including Police Youth Aid), mental health services, and education supports, contributing to increased pressure on existing systems and reduced capacity to provide timely and consistent interventions for mokopuna and whānau in the rohe. Police informed Mana Mokopuna that there were approximately 30 Police vacancies at the local station at the time of this April 2026 monitoring visit. Recruitment is a continual challenge for Te Tairāwhiti, and the impact is that Police officers hold multiple portfolios and are regularly re-deployed away from core roles to focus on adult serious crime. Preventative work with mokopuna becomes a lower priority.

External agencies further emphasised the need for prevention focused responses across services in Te Tairāwhiti. This included strengthening early whānau intervention approaches, improving collaboration between agencies, and building stronger community partnerships to better support mokopuna and whānau before issues escalate to needing statutory or custodial interventions. Compared with larger metropolitan centres, service providers the OPCAT Monitoring team spoke with said that the rohe has fewer specialist services including mokopuna specific mentoring programmes and alternatives to mainstream education. Concerns were also raised regarding gaps in the continuity of care, particularly around placement options or transition from residential care. These limitations were identified as potential barriers to accessing quality support for whānau. Enhanced coordination across the system was identified as critical to improving outcomes and reducing repeated statutory system involvement for mokopuna.

Detailed information is needed to tailor support for mokopuna

Practice at Te Whārau reflected careful decision-making and professional judgement with placement and care decisions informed by factors such as local dynamics, gang affiliations, behavioural risks, medication needs, allergies, and the suitability of the environment for each tamaiti referred. These considerations aimed to balance safety while responding to the unique circumstances of mokopuna. Kaimahi demonstrated a strong understanding of the complexities associated with supporting mokopuna diagnosed with neurodiversity, trauma,

and mental health needs, adapting their approaches to maintain safety, connection, and stability while responding to individual needs.

Kaimahi shared with the OPCAT Monitoring team that information contained within Oranga Tamariki All About Me Plans (AAMPs) was often limited and did not always provide sufficient detail to fully understand the strengths, needs, risks, and circumstances of mokopuna. The OPCAT Monitoring team reviewed both AAMPs and Tūranga Social Service developed Oranga Ake plans and found that mokopuna Oranga Tamariki site social worker driven AAMPs lacked detail, while Oranga Ake plans provided a significantly more comprehensive and holistic understanding of te tamaiti, including their aspirations, cultural identity, support needs, and goals.

Gaps in information sharing were also reflected in practice. Te tamaiti described receiving regular phone contact from their Oranga Tamariki site allocated social worker but said this social worker was not always easy to understand and that information was sometimes just repeated without addressing their questions or concerns. Te tamaiti said this resulted in frustration due to the lack of information they were receiving. Te tamaiti also expressed frustration regarding changing expectations around their bail application and placement timeframe, which contributed to uncertainty and reduced confidence in the information being provided. Kaimahi gave an example of this happening recently. They explained that for te tamaiti currently in the whare, two planning hui had been organised prior to his court date to support coordinated decision-making and planning. While the Tūranga Social Services and other stakeholders attended, kaimahi advised that the social worker was unable to attend and no communication regarding their absence was received. Kaimahi further advised that the social worker was also absent from the subsequent court appearance, resulting in the matter being deferred. This created uncertainty for mokopuna and highlighted the importance of timely communication, continuity of support, and coordinated engagement across those involved in mokopuna care.

Across all OPCAT monitoring for residences and remand homes, Oranga Tamariki site allocated social worker engagement with mokopuna on their caseloads varies greatly yet has a significant impact on mokopuna experiences in secure facilities. Through its OPCAT Monitoring, Mana Mokopuna continuously recommends that Oranga Tamariki ensure their site social workers adhere to internal policies regarding contact with mokopuna¹⁶ and ensure comprehensive information is relayed to service providers who are charged with the daily care of mokopuna at the point of admission. This includes ensuring All About Me Plans (AAMPs) are completed in full.¹⁷

¹⁶ [Allocating a key worker and co-worker | Practice Centre | Oranga Tamariki](#)

¹⁷ [All About Me plan | Practice Centre | Oranga Tamariki](#)

Communications can be strengthened with the Oranga Tamariki Placements Team

During this April 2026 OPCAT Monitoring visit, kaimahi working in Te Whārau said that inconsistent communication between the Oranga Tamariki Placement Team and Tūranga Social Services has impacted planning and continuity of care for mokopuna. Kaimahi described increasing difficulties engaging with the Placement Team, with some enquiries receiving no response or only automated email replies. One example involved a request from the Placement Team for daily reports on mokopuna engagement as well as the weekly reports already being provided. Kaimahi advised that no guidance or reporting template was supplied from Oranga Tamariki. Following an incident in the whare, a daily report was submitted to the Placement Team and which received only an automated response and nobody contacted the whare to answer questions from kaimahi. Mana Mokopuna raised this matter with the Oranga Tamariki Placement Team during this April 2026 OPCAT Monitoring visit, resulting in clarification of reporting expectations and communication pathways moving forward. This was communicated back to kaimahi at Te Whārau providing assistance in-real time to ease pressures around reporting to Oranga Tamariki.

Mana Mokopuna recommends that the Oranga Tamariki Placement Team strengthen their relationship with remand homes given personnel changes and be clear on what mandatory reporting is required. Clear communication pathways, timely responses, and consistent provider engagement are important to supporting effective placement coordination, continuity of care, and positive outcomes for mokopuna.

Sustaining kaimahi through reflective practice and supervision

The Leadership team for Te Whārau prioritised kaimahi ora (wellbeing) through rosters that allowed for a good balance of whānau time, practice reflection, and professional development. Kaimahi shared that they have access to internal and external supervision that supports their wellbeing. The Tūranga Social Services Manager facilitated fortnightly team hui that reviewed processes and provided regular opportunities for kaimahi to reflect on practice, discuss emerging concerns, and strengthen collective responses to challenges. Kaimahi shared how supported, available, and visible their Leadership team is in the whare, describing a culture where it is safe to learn from each other.

Reflective practice is also used to support early identification of risks, promote consistency in responses, and identify opportunities for on-going improvement. For example, the Tūranga Social Services Manager advised that periods when no mokopuna were residing in the whare are used to undertake training refreshers and reinforce expectations around practice. Mana Mokopuna was able to give real-time feedback regarding practice areas that required addressing. These included keeping good line of sight, ensuring the office door is shut and locked when not in use and that kaimahi personal cell phones are not left in common areas unattended. The Leadership team committed to addressing these practice points through training.

Mātauranga



Mātauranga is the sharing and valuing of knowledge, traditional and contemporary, to empower mokopuna. It ensures they have access to learning, wisdom, and opportunities that support their growth and potential.

Understanding mokopuna journey into the whare

A significant strength seen during this April 2026 OPCAT Monitoring visit is the use of the Tūranga Social Services developed Oranga Ake Plan. Kaimahi described the plan as a living document that brought together information from available assessments, conversations with mokopuna, and kaimahi observations made during mokopuna placement in the whare. Underpinned by the Meihana Model¹⁸ and Te Whare Tapa Whā¹⁹, the plan provides a detailed and holistic understanding of each tamaiti strengths, aspirations, needs, interests, and support requirements.

"This has so much information in the [Oranga Ake] plan about mokopuna"
(Oranga Tamariki site Social worker)

Kaimahi explained that the Oranga Ake plan seeks to build a richer picture of mokopuna through on-going engagement and relationship-building. Kaimahi shared that an Oranga Tamariki social worker commented how much information was in the Oranga Ake Plan compared to an All About Me Plan, reflecting the depth and quality of information captured. The plans were accessible to authorised personnel through secure systems, ensuring all kaimahi supporting mokopuna had a shared understanding of their circumstances, strengths, and goals.

Culturally grounded learning and strengths-based education

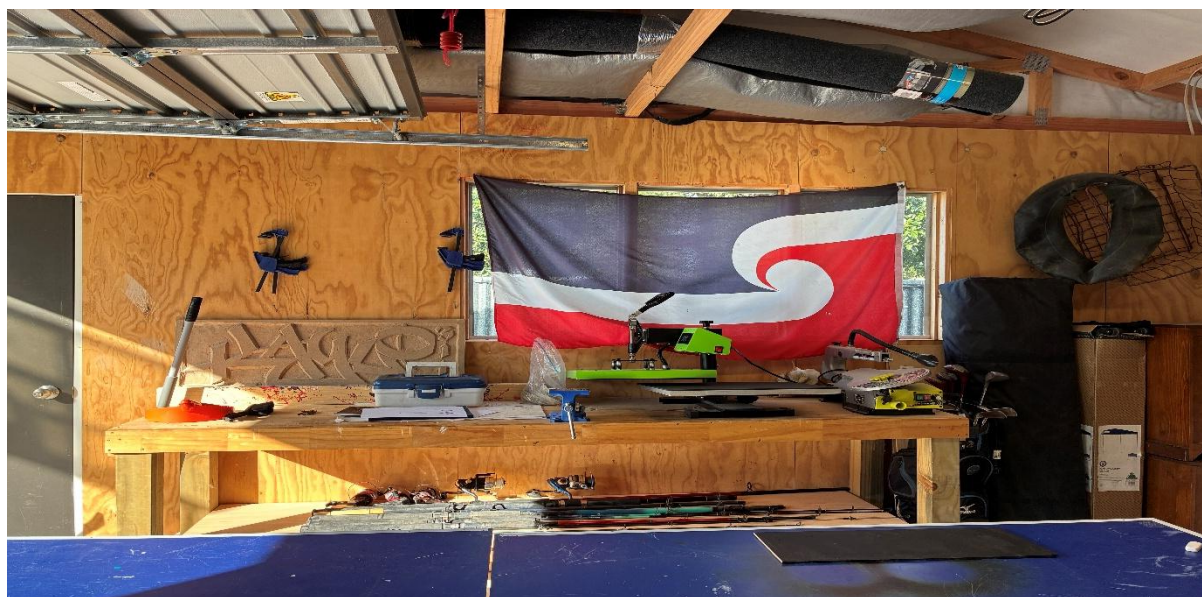
Learning at Te Whārau is grounded in a holistic view of mokopuna. Education and practice approaches draw upon both Te Whare Tapa Whā and the Meihana Model providing a holistic framework through which education, culture, emotional, physical, and the social wellbeing of mokopuna is understood and supported. The classroom area is separate to the whare, which provides an intentional space for mokopuna to learn.

Throughout this April 2026 OPCAT Monitoring visit, te tamaiti was observed engaging in a range of activities that strengthened cultural identity, belonging, and connection to whakapapa. This included pepeha development, whakapapa learning, carving and mahi toi, and other cultural activities that reinforced a sense of identity. Kaimahi and kaiako also shared their mātauranga, lived experiences, and practical skills in ways that were authentic and responsive to the interests of te tamaiti. For example, one kaimahi was teaching te tamaiti how

¹⁸ [The Meihana Model | RNZCGP](#)

¹⁹ [Te Whare Tapa Whā model of Māori health | Ministry of Health NZ](#)

to fish and catch their own kai. This reflected an environment where learning was actively lived and shared rather than taught on paper.



Carving project and equipment used by mokopuna

Central to this approach is a strong emphasis on identifying and building upon mokopuna strengths, interests, and aspirations. Kaiako target the time they have with mokopuna to identify meaningful goals and areas of interest to promote their educational success during their time in the whare. Learning opportunities were tailored to enable mokopuna to experience achievement and strengthen their sense of capability and confidence.

"It's best to work on strengths rather than trying to catch up major deficits."

(Kaimahi)

During this OPCAT Monitoring visit, mokopuna shared that they had completed a Work Site Safety certificate, were working towards obtaining their driver licence, developing their curriculum vitae, and exploring further training opportunities upon leaving the whare. Kaimahi also described supporting te tamaiti with a project exploring the Māori Battalion, which included watching the movie "*Sgt. Haane*"²⁰ and visiting the Tairāwhiti Museum²¹ to strengthen their understanding of the experiences of Māori during the Second World War. Creative and practical learning opportunities further supported mokopuna engagement. Mokopuna could participate in screen-printing hoodies and t-shirts and complete hands-on projects like making and decorating small tables that enabled self-expression and skill development. Examples of previous mokopuna achievements remained visible within the learning environment, including artwork and furniture projects that celebrated contribution and creativity and providing current mokopuna with inspiration.

Across the monitoring visit, learning was relevant, meaningful, and connected to the aspirations of mokopuna. Education was not simply viewed as academic achievement, but as

²⁰ <https://www.nzfilm.co.nz/films/sgt-haane>

²¹ [Home - Tairāwhiti Museum](#)

a pathway for strengthening identity, building confidence, developing practical life skills and creating opportunities for a positive future. This approach and model of learning upheld the mana of mokopuna and connection to future aspirations.

Capability building and practice development

Capability building and on-going practice development were identified as key enablers of safe, responsive, and culturally grounded care at Te Whārau. Training provided included Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI)²², first aid, Oranga Tamariki Medication Management Certification, and broader practice development modules. These opportunities enabled kaimahi to be formally certified to administer medication to mokopuna and strengthened their ability to respond safely and appropriately in practice settings. Additional training supported understanding of trauma, behavioural escalation, ADHD, and mental health needs, equipping kaimahi to respond to a wide range of behavioural and emotional presentations in a safe and informed manner.

A range of systems and tools were in place to support kaimahi communication with each other and storing documentation that can be edited on the go to promote consistent care for mokopuna. These included Power Apps²³, Microsoft Teams, to edit and store Risk Assessment Management forms (RAMs) and shift notes. Comprehensive guidance and section prompts were visible to kaimahi when they filled out these forms to ensure a standard application of the Tūranga Social Services policies and a consistent level of detail to inform mokopuna care. Whilst kaimahi did use personal mobiles to access these apps, multi-factor authentication and privacy controls were in place to protect mokopuna information and organisational data. Kaimahi said the use of these apps has improved the quality of shift notes so that everyone is on the same page when engaging with various mokopuna. Shift overview notes captured key information including kaimahi on shift, duties completed, kaimahi and mokopuna wellbeing concerns, incidents, and handover information for incoming shifts.

Kaimahi reflected on the importance of balancing appropriate information sharing with privacy, confidentiality, and safe practice. Mana Mokopuna recommends Tūranga Social Services purchase shift cell phones to remove the need for kaimahi to use personal devices for mahi. Keeping information on personal kaimahi phones may prohibit full information being passed on to mokopuna should they wish to access their information via (for example) Official Information Act requests in the future.

²² [Crisis Prevention Institute \(CPI\) | CPI Training | New Zealand](#)

²³ [What is Power Apps? - Power Apps | Microsoft Learn](#)

Aroha



Aroha is the expression of love, respect, kindness, generosity, and empathy that upholds the inherent mana of mokopuna. It nurtures wellbeing and affirms self-worth, creating safe, caring environments where mokopuna can flourish in their own potential.

Aroha flows through the whare

Within the context of Te Whārao, aroha was reflected not only as an expression of care and compassion, but as a relational practice grounded in manaakitanga. During this April 2026 OPCAT Monitoring visit the following statement was prominently displayed on the central, lounge whiteboard:

“Te tikanga i tēnei whare – Manaakitanga.”
(the guiding principle for this whare – hospitality and care for others).

Manaakitanga was evident in the way kaimahi and mokopuna interacted with one another and with the OPCAT Monitoring team. Relaxed conversations, humour and engagement were seen in all areas of the whare, whether that was around the kitchen table, outside in the garden, in the classroom or watching TV in the lounge. Following the mihi whakatau, kaimahi and mokopuna were observed sharing conversations and laughter as they moved together towards the kitchen to prepare kai before eating together outside. Interactions across the whare were warm and respectful.

Kaimahi also demonstrated aroha and an understanding of the importance of reducing uncertainty and emotional distress for mokopuna by taking time to explain routines, expectations, and the daily rhythms of the whare. For example, the OPCAT Monitoring team saw how kaimahi provided ongoing support to te tamaiti following a declined bail application and disengagement from their social worker’s support. Kaimahi responded with encouragement and active presence while remaining careful not to make promises to te tamaiti that could not be guaranteed. Kaimahi and te tamaiti said this approach reduced anxiety and isolation while ensuring te tamaiti remained connected, informed and emotionally supported during a period of heightened vulnerability.

Shared kai strengthens mokopuna connection

Shared kai played a significant role in strengthening connection, participation, and belonging within the whare. The OPCAT Monitoring team could see how kai was more than a routine activity and that it served as a space to whakawhānaungatanga. As part of everyday-life routines, mokopuna were encouraged to participate in meal preparation. During this April 2026 OPCAT Monitoring visit, te tamaiti helped around the whare without being asked, showing a sense of ownership and investment in the collective life of the whare.

Te tamaiti spoke positively about the quality of kai and the experience of sharing meals together, expressing pride in contributing and in the enjoyment of eating together within a supportive environment.

*"I don't even like roast pork, or chicken, but I'd rather have roast chicken here than McDonalds."
(Mokopuna)*

Te tamaiti highlighted the value placed on the sense of care, connection, and normality created through shared meals. These moments reflected manaakitanga in practice, fostering a sense of belonging. The pride expressed by te tamaiti in preparing and sharing kai, demonstrated how aroha was embedded within the everyday rhythms of the Te Whārau o Tairāwhiti Remand Home.

Appendix One

Gathering information

Mana Mokopuna gather a range of information and evidence to support the analysis to develop findings for this report. These collectively form the basis of our recommendations.

Method	Role
Interviews and informal discussions with mokopuna.	
Interviews and informal discussions with kaimahi and external stakeholders	■ Mokopuna ■ Whānau ■ Tūranga Social Service Manager ■ Te Whārau Tairāwhiti Remand Home Manager ■ Team Leader ■ Kaiako ■ Kaimahi ■ VOYCE Whakarongo Mai ■ Police Youth Aid Officer ■ Police Iwi Liaison Officer ■ Oranga Tamariki National Manager Homes and Work Environment Infrastructure ■ Oranga Tamariki Local Site Kaimahi ■ Oranga Tamariki Assessments Lead National Placements Team
Documentation	■ Mokopuna All About Me Plans ■ Mokopuna Oranga Ake Plans ■ Incident reports ■ Shift notes ■ Shift task outlines ■ Best Practice outlines and guidance ■ RAMs forms ■ Medications register ■ Kaimahi roster ■ Process escapes custody ■ Process whānau visits
Observations and engagements with mokopuna	■ Daily routines and mealtimes ■ Handovers and where hui ■ Free time ■ Community Activity ■ Education sessions