

04 July 2023

Judge Frances Eivers
Children's Commissioner
Office of the Children's Commissioner
Sent via email: [REDACTED]

Tēnā koe Judge Eivers

Draft OPCAT Report – Whakatakapokai

In March 2023, your monitoring team visited Whakatakapokai to monitor the safety and wellbeing of tamariki and rangatahi. This monitoring visit was completed as part of your role as a National Preventive Mechanism under the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT), and was a follow-up visit to the full visit completed in March 2022.

On 16 May 2023, you provided your draft OPCAT report for Whakatakapokai for our review and comment. Our response to the factual accuracy was shared with you on 25 May 2023.

Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki) had previously accepted the five systemic recommendations and the five facility recommendations made in your March 2022 report. Please find enclosed our updated response to these recommendations following your follow-up visit.

Your positive findings and the evidence found of the good progress Whakatakapokai has made on the 2022 recommendations was pleasing to note. The improvements to HR policy and practices, positive relationships, therapeutic model of care, access to a range of activities internally and off-site, and the involvement of whānau are valued insights. In our recent relationship hui with your office, it was again pleasing to hear such positive feedback about the care provided for mokopuna at Whakatakapokai, and the acknowledgement of the quality of work being done. I was particularly pleased to note the additional cultural training in place and the role of rangatahi mentors in supporting stronger connections between rangatahi and their whānau and community.

We acknowledge the areas in your report that require further work to progress. I am particularly concerned about the matters you raised regarding young people with low level offending being admitted to Whakatakapokai, the impacts of collocation with

Korowai Manaaki and the increase in issues regarding aggressive behaviour and contraband that you note. I will share these matters with my DCE colleagues.

It is important that care and transition planning is further strengthened, and we anticipate that our transition to using 'All About Me Plans' (AAMP) instead of Individual Care Plans at Whakatakapokai, and later all youth justice residence, will address this. We are pleased to read that Whakatakapokai staff continue to advocate for the voices and needs of rangatahi, which will help support the important co-working relationship with their care and protection and youth justice social worker who lead the development of AAMPs.

Workforce development continues to be an important organisational focus, as does strengthening our complaints mechanisms as part of the Manaaki Kōrero Project. This and other work occurring nationally on our Future Direction Plan and response to the Ministerial Advisory Board's Residence Review, will result in further operational solutions over time. This work is an organisational priority.

Whilst we have made some improvements in our residential settings, there remains a need to further strengthen service delivery across Oranga Tamariki residences. As you have been made aware, on 21 June 2023, the Oranga Tamariki Chief Executive announced during a press conference that former Police Commissioner Mike Bush had agreed to join Oranga Tamariki to temporarily lead our Youth Justice and Care and Protection residences.

Mike will undertake a rapid review of residences and lead work to ensure that tamariki, rangatahi and our kaimahi in residences are safe and well supported. We are grateful to have his experience and expertise supporting this aspect of Service Delivery.

Mike has an open mandate from the Chief Executive to drive any improvements with urgency where required. Shannon Pakura from the Ministerial Advisory Board will assist Mike as part of the independent team that will have a direct line into the Office of the Chief Social Worker.

As our response demonstrates, there is considerable ongoing work which will contribute to further improvements in the quality of care provided for mokopuna at Whakatakapokai and all Oranga Tamariki Residences generally. We look forward to updating you and your team as this work progresses.

I trust you find this information useful. If you have any questions or would like further information, please feel free to contact me on [REDACTED], or alternatively [REDACTED]

Nāku noa, nā



Nicolette Dickson
Tumu Tuarua | Te Kōunga o te Mahi me ngā Wheako
Deputy Chief Executive | Quality Practice & Experiences