



Epuni Care and Protection Residence

OPCAT Monitoring Report

Visit date: 4 September 2024

Report date: September 2024



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.



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Introduction

The role of Mana Mokopuna – Children and Young People's Commission

Mana Mokopuna - Children and Young People's Commission (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, up to 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 a designated National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) 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 function at Mana Mokopuna is to visit places where mokopuna are detained:

- Examine the conditions and treatment of mokopuna.
- Identify any improvements required or problems needing to be addressed.
- Make recommendations aimed at strengthening protections, improving treatment and conditions, and preventing torture, cruel, inhuman, degrading treatment or punishment.

About this visit

Mana Mokopuna conducted an unannounced one-day follow-up visit to Epuni Care and Protection Residence (Epuni) on 4 September 2024 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.

The Mana Mokopuna OPCAT monitoring team has been keeping a watching brief on the Epuni residence following concerns raised during the full unannounced visit undertaken by the team in April 2024. The purpose of this follow-up visit in September 2024 was to review progress on the Oranga Tamariki action plan for Epuni that had been developed to address concerns raised by Mana Mokopuna as a result of the April 2024 full unannounced visit, and to kōrero with mokopuna, kaimahi and external stakeholders regarding their experiences in the residence since the April 2024 monitoring visit.



About this report

This report provides a progress update as at September 2024 on the summary of findings, which Mana Mokopuna documented in its earlier report relating to the unannounced visit in April 2024. This report outlines the quality of mokopuna experience at the facility and provides evidence of the findings based on information gathered during the visit.

About this facility

Facility Name:	Epuni Care and Protection Residence, operated by Oranga Tamariki
Region:	Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington)
Operating capacity:	<p>20 bed capacity - the maximum capacity at Epuni is 20 beds, with a current maximum safe operating capacity of up to 15 beds.</p> <p>Epuni is made up of two units that house both tāne and wāhine together. These units contain bedrooms, bathrooms, a dining area, kitchen, television room, courtyards, and rooms for mokopuna to regulate their behaviour and have phone calls. There is an additional area designated for secure care.</p> <p>There were eight mokopuna on-site at the time of the visit.</p>
Status under which mokopuna are detained: Sections 78 and 101, Oranga Tamariki Act 1989, orders under the Care of Children Act 2004.	

At the outset of this report, Mana Mokopuna – Children and Young People’s Commission acknowledges the historic abuse of mokopuna, which has occurred at Epuni as substantiated through the proceedings of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care and Faith-based Care. We acknowledge the mokopuna who have been victims of this past trauma and harm experienced at Epuni and its lifelong repercussions on their wellbeing.

Mana Mokopuna is very mindful that the current Epuni Care and Protection Residence remains on the site of the original Epuni home. During our earlier full unannounced monitoring visit in April 2024 both whānau and kaimahi Māori shared with Mana Mokopuna the impact intergenerational trauma has had on them, either working at the facility or when whānau who have experience themselves of living at Epuni, visit their mokopuna currently residing at the facility. Mana Mokopuna acknowledges the reflections shared with us when we monitor this facility.



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 Observations¹ for New Zealand's sixth periodic review on its implementation of the Children's Convention² 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 Observations³ for New Zealand's seventh periodic review regarding the implementation of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment⁴.

Many of the recommendations from both sets of Concluding Observations are directly relevant to aspects of treatment experienced by mokopuna at Epuni which Mana Mokopuna has found during this monitoring visit in September 2024. Where relevant, these are highlighted throughout the body of the report.

Current landscape for Epuni

In April 2024, Mana Mokopuna found no evidence of cruel, inhuman, degrading treatment or punishment (ill-treatment) during the full unannounced visit to Epuni. However, Mana Mokopuna made a recommendation to Oranga Tamariki immediately following the April 2024 monitoring visit to halt admissions and re-set the residence. The purpose of the re-set was to give kaimahi the chance to re-train, re-energise and re-establish a leadership culture that supports kaimahi who are working directly with mokopuna, to focus on maintaining consistent practice approaches that ensure the safety of mokopuna. Oranga Tamariki acted swiftly on this recommendation and put an action plan for Epuni into place to address initial concerns raised by Mana Mokopuna. Mana Mokopuna has been closely monitoring monthly progress updates received from Oranga Tamariki about the Epuni action plan to ascertain practice improvements, and we welcome Oranga Tamariki's transparency in this regard and the commitment to make improvements consistent with Mana Mokopuna's recommendations flowing out of the April 2024 visit and subsequent monitoring report (published in October 2024).

In September 2024, through the one-day follow-up monitoring visit, Mana Mokopuna found that there had been some positive progress made to address the concerns raised in April 2024, and these are outlined within this report.

¹ Refer CRC/C/NZL/CO/6 [G2302344 \(3\).pdf](#)

² [Convention on the Rights of the Child | OHCHR](#)

³ Refer CAT/C/NZL/CO/7 [G2315464.pdf](#)

⁴ [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment | OHCHR](#)



Despite some progress, Epuni continues to remain in a critical state of transition, requiring ongoing resource, support, and stability, particularly within the leadership team, to address ongoing concerns and to continue to improve the treatment, conditions, care, and safety experiences for mokopuna living in the residence.

Of note, mokopuna Māori continue to be overrepresented within the facility and five of the eight mokopuna placed in Epuni at the time of this visit in September 2024 could whakapapa Māori. Four mokopuna out of this group of five had whakapapa connections to Ngāpuhi. Tailored initiatives to support mokopuna Māori and culturally responsive support systems need to be developed and put in place at Epuni. and at the system-level, to ensure equitable solutions, uphold the right of mokopuna to their culture and identity, and to address the underlying causes of mokopuna Māori overrepresentation within the care and protection system.

Summary of progress (as at September 2024 visit) on concerns raised in April 2024

Work still to be done:

- Epuni remains in a critical state of transition. The acting residence manager is returning to their substantive position at Oranga Tamariki National Office and this has created uncertainty and anxiety for kaimahi and stakeholders alike. There are concerns that another change in leadership at Epuni will have a negative impact on the progress the residence is making, which in turn raises concerns that this will have a negative impact on mokopuna care.
 - There has been positive progress made in the facility since the April monitoring visit, however there is a long way to go in terms of upskilling kaimahi practice, implementing on-going training, supervision, resetting and rebuilding the culture and establishing trust amongst kaimahi and stakeholders.
 - There is a feeling from kaimahi, that just as the residence was improving, the driver of this change, the Acting Manager, is leaving.
- Team Leader Operations (TLO's) training needs to be prioritised and implemented as a matter of urgency.
- Any use of force on mokopuna needs to be consistently logged and reviewed, consistent with requirements under the Oranga Tamariki Residential Care Regulations.⁵ There is currently no documented evidence or paper-trail of a review, only a tick-box exercise stating the review was completed.
- Residential kaimahi are often not consulted about new mokopuna admissions and are given minimal notice to plan and prepare for new admissions into the facility.

⁵ [Oranga Tamariki \(Residential Care\) Regulations 1996 \(SR 1996/354\) \(as at 01 July 2023\) – New Zealand Legislation](#)



- Although medication errors have reduced since the April visit, errors are still occurring, requiring the continued implementation and oversight of clear medication dispensing processes and practice.
- Kaimahi spoke positively about the trainings they have engaged in, however shared that there is still a need for specialised training to support mokopuna who have mental health needs.

From a material conditions perspective, priority is needed to be given to:

- addressing the conditions in secure care at Epuni; and
- ensuring the sensory room in the education block is completed for mokopuna to access support for their emotional regulation.

Positive progress since April 2024:

- Kaimahi have engaged in several training opportunities, including 32 youth workers since April 2024 have enrolled, and are in the process of completing their level three Youth Work qualification.
- There has been an increase in programmes and offsites for mokopuna to engage in, in addition to education.
- There has been a reduction in medication errors and medical clinic hours are back to operating at full capacity.
- Mokopuna are engaging and attending education in both units.



Recommendations

Below are additional facility-level recommendations for Epuni in addition to the recommendations made for the April 2024 visit:

	Recommendation
1	Given the change in residence manager, continue to monitor Epuni progress closely and update the residence progress plan weekly.
2	Provide specific TLO training as promised as a matter of urgency.
3	Ensure there is an on-going commitment to regular training including specialised training to support mokopuna who have mental health needs, refreshers, and access to supervision for all kaimahi working at Epuni. Regular updates should be seen in the residence weekly progress plan.
4	Ensure medication check sheets are reviewed weekly by the Quality Lead and that audit findings are recorded in the residence progress plan.
5	Ensure reviews of use of force incidents are occurring, evidenced, and documented accurately and in line with the Care Regulations.
6	A member of the senior leadership team at Epuni is involved in assessing new admissions for the residence to ensure mokopuna care needs can be met.
7	The Secure Care unit and sensory room are refurbished with urgency.

Detailed key findings

Leadership and Culture

Upon arrival to the facility Mana Mokopuna was informed that the acting residence manager was due to return to their substantive position at Oranga Tamariki National Office within a matter of weeks. Kaimahi had been informed of this change on the day of our arrival and external stakeholders and mokopuna were yet to be told. There was an expression of interest being advertised internally and externally to fill this position for a period of six months.

Kaimahi said the announcement was causing uncertainty and anxiety, particularly around who would be filling this management position and whether the mahi undertaken thus far to reset the residence and culture would become undone. Kaimahi were very concerned that the latest change would destabilise the residence once again, just as progress was being made to improve.

Since the April visit by Mana Mokopuna, the acting residence manager has been focused on addressing the issues that exist within the leadership group to develop stability, rebuild trust with kaimahi, and reset the culture within the residence to be one of transparency and support. Key changes implemented had included outlining clear communication channels through



managers, managers undertaking their own training, kaimahi receiving a full induction⁶, regular training for kaimahi, and supervision with a strong focus on kaimahi wellbeing. Kaimahi are being better supported to identify areas of development.

Training, safety, and practice are currently the three focus areas the leadership team are prioritising, to ensure kaimahi have the tools they need to provide good care to mokopuna. There is now a clear expectation that inappropriate practice or behaviours displayed by kaimahi are to be challenged and immediately addressed with one-to-one kōrero by leadership to support professional development. If kaimahi continue to revert to inappropriate ways of practice and do not meet the expectations set out by the leadership team, they will be held accountable via performance management plans as managers, have been clear that mokopuna deserve and have a right to a high standard of care whilst in residence⁷. Kaimahi reiterated this shift in expectations had occurred and could articulate how the residence had changed during the last five months.

Mana Mokopuna is concerned the change in residence manager could have a detrimental effect on the continued improvement of residence operations, and with it, the that care mokopuna can expect to receive. Kaimahi across the board had shared that they felt the “ship had started to turn” (in a positive direction) but believed this progress is now in jeopardy.

Mana Mokopuna recommends Oranga Tamariki continues to monitor the residence closely and update the residence progress plan weekly.

Recruitment

There has been a recruitment drive to increase staffing numbers within the residence, and this was evident during the September visit as several kaimahi we spoke to were new in their role, compared to April when staffing levels were critical negatively impacting on the care of mokopuna. There has been a recent employment of a third Team Leader Operations (TLO) to support the care team kaimahi (kaimahi working directly with mokopuna). There are less vacancies compared to the visit in April for residential youth workers. There were eleven vacancies in April compared to the current four at the time of the September visit. The four vacancies have gone through interview processes and preferred candidates identified.⁸ There have also been seven positions introduced for residential social workers, which are new roles for the facility, and these are currently in the shortlisting phase of recruitment. Once the recruitment process is complete, it is integral that there is a strong, consistent onboarding process for new kaimahi. This includes undertaking a comprehensive induction training programme to ensure kaimahi are well trained and supported to provide a high standard of care for mokopuna who are admitted into Epuni.

⁶ Te Waharoa is the Oranga Tamariki residence induction programme.

⁷ [Oranga Tamariki \(Residential Care\) Regulations 1996 \(SR 1996/354\) \(as at 01 July 2023\) 3 Right to professional and planned standards of care – New Zealand Legislation](#)

⁸ Data provided by Oranga Tamariki



Training

The Leadership team at Epuni recognised that the current workforce is predominantly inexperienced and unqualified, and they require a lot of work to upskill and build their capability. There have been several trainings that all front line kaimahi have engaged in and these workshops have been provided by the Epuni training facilitator. The focus has been on practice fundamentals such as line of sight, secure care practice, recording and reporting incidents. All new kaimahi to Epuni have undertaken a three-week induction training programme. Kaimahi spoke positively about the trainings they have engaged in, however shared that there is still a need for specialised training to support mokopuna who have mental health needs.

On-going training is scheduled to continue every Tuesday to upskill kaimahi and develop the learning and supervision culture being built in Epuni.

The following trainings have been implemented for kaimahi since the April visit:⁹

- After the monitoring visit in April, Oranga Tamariki responded to the concerns by halting admissions of mokopuna into the facility to allow one unit to be utilised for kaimahi to engage in scenario-based trainings.
- All kaimahi attended a culture-setting presentation led by the Residence Manager, which focused on the 'behaviour you walk past is the behaviour you accept', looking at the journey from where the team has been, where they are wanting to go and how this will be achieved.
- The clinical team and members of the care team visited another residence to observe how operations function to learn new ways of practice that can be integrated into the operations at Epuni.
- The care team kaimahi attended a one-day training on trauma informed practice
- A training on understanding neurodiversity, Intellectual Disability and Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD).
- A two-day refresher training on Te Waharoa.
- The care team kaimahi attended a two-day Safety Intervention training run by the Crisis Prevention Institute.¹⁰
- Leadership attended a three-day in-house training in May 2024, focused on trauma informed practice, creating a supportive team environment and an introduction to supervision to support on-going professional and practice development of kaimahi.
- 32 youth workers that work in Epuni and across the community homes attached to the residence are currently enrolled in their New Zealand Certificate in Youth Work (Level 3) qualification delivered by Te Pūkenga¹¹.

⁹ Data received from Oranga Tamariki

¹⁰ [Crisis Prevention Institute \(CPI\) | CPI Training | New Zealand](#)

¹¹ [Te Pūkenga – New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology \(xn--tepkenga-szb.ac.nz\)](#)



- The Youth workers are due to graduate by the end of 2024 and additional youth workers at Epuni have indicated interest to enrol in 2025 if funding is approved.
- Kaimahi are currently engaging in and completing a range of E-learning modules¹²

Specific training for the Team Leader Operations (TLO) group has yet to occur. Kaimahi said it has been promised, however they are still waiting to attend it. As an interim measure, the TLO's have undergone a two-day Te Waharoa training and a two-day safety intervention training, that were adapted to be specific to their leadership roles.

Mana Mokopuna recommends that specific TLO training is delivered as a matter of urgency, given the employment of a new TLO and the crucial role TLO's play in overseeing operations of the care team, including providing supervision.

Kaimahi Practice

Many kaimahi acknowledged that there is still a long way to go in terms of developing good consistent practice, for example, ensuring appropriate line of sight between mokopuna and kaimahi, and the varying quality of recording in logbooks remains a concern. The Leadership team has been proactive in providing guidance to ensure documentation aligns with the National Care Standards, the Residential Care Regulations 1996 and that kaimahi understand why it is essential that documentation is up to standard. For example, the leadership team has been reviewing the seized/prohibited items process, which has resulted in an increase in the number of items seized as processes are being followed correctly. Programmed activity has also been reviewed to ensure it has therapeutic value, is age appropriate, and aligned to the National Care Standards.¹³

The foundations are continuing to be built to reset the practice and processes within the residence and kaimahi remain open-minded and willing to develop to meet the needs of mokopuna. However, the on-going challenge the Leadership Team has identified has been ensuring the learnings from trainings are being quickly translated into practice, rather than resorting back to old ways of practice when managing the care and needs of mokopuna. The Leadership Team said that they are committed to maintaining on-going training to build capability within the workforce, and that for those kaimahi who are not adhering to expectations, there is a commitment to holding them accountable.

There has also been a commitment to implement supervision for every kaimahi working in the facility, in line with the supervision policy¹⁴. This continues to be an identified area that requires

¹² E-learning modules consist of: Child Safe, Compliments, complaints and suggestions, Employee browsing, Health, Safety and Security, Information Security, Code of Conduct, Privacy at Oranga Tamariki, Public service induction, Welcome to Oranga Tamariki and Fleet Training.

¹³ [Oranga Tamariki \(National Care Standards and Related Matters\) Regulations 2018 \(LI 2018/111\) \(as at 01 May 2023\) 34 Support for play, recreation, and community activities – New Zealand Legislation](#)

¹⁴ [Professional supervision | Practice Centre | Oranga Tamariki](#)



improvement and has been made a standing agenda item at the weekly Epuni senior leadership hui.

Mana Mokopuna recommends that there is an on-going commitment to regular training including specialised training to support mokopuna with mental health needs, refreshers, and access to supervision for all kaimahi working at Epuni.

Use of Force and Secure Care

Kaimahi said there continues to be inconsistencies in use of force on mokopuna being recorded, including use of force incidents not always being captured in incident reports. For example, there have been times where senior kaimahi have heard of an incident and have been required to search for the details in daily unit logbooks or mokopuna case notes. A new process has been implemented where daily checks are carried out in line with the Care Regulations, to ensure use of force incidents are being recorded accurately.

Another on-going concern is regarding documentation to evidence use of force reviews have been completed. All instances where force is used involving mokopuna must be assessed to ascertain if the force was warranted and in line with their Safety Intervention¹⁵. In the documentation cited by Mana Mokopuna in September 2024, there was no narrative detailing the review nor the findings of the reviewer, and instead correspondence simply stated use of force review “completed”.

Mana Mokopuna recommends that the reviewing and recording of use of force incidents needs to be addressed immediately to ensure reviews are occurring, evidenced, and documented accurately and in line with the Care Regulations¹⁶.

Secure care admissions have decreased since April, however, there has been a reduced number of mokopuna in the facility. This may have contributed to the lower number of admissions and is an area that requires on-going monitoring and review.

Programmes and activity

Following the visit in April and concerns raised around the reliance on screen-based activity and content not always being appropriate for mokopuna, the use of television to entertain mokopuna was reviewed. Television time is now structured, with movie nights occurring once a week, usually in the weekends or for a particular programme kaimahi may be running. The change in TV usage has been implemented to prevent kaimahi using TV to entertain mokopuna for hours on end.

Music has also been reintroduced back into the units during activities, however YouTube is not used with content that has derogatory language. Kaimahi are also no longer able to have

¹⁵ [Working with tamariki and rangatahi in residences | Practice Centre | Oranga Tamariki](#)

¹⁶ [Oranga Tamariki \(Residential Care\) Regulations 1996 \(SR 1996/354\) \(as at 01 July 2023\) 22 Use of force in dealing with child or young person – New Zealand Legislation](#)



mobile phones on the units, with the exception of the shift leader, which has also helped to reduce mokopuna being able to access inappropriate content.

The decision to review programmes offered to mokopuna as a result of our previous visit has helped contribute to kaimahi becoming more proactive in developing activities for mokopuna to engage in after school and in the weekends.

Programmes and activities¹⁷ have consisted of:

- Core programmes including rules and regulations, secure care, rights, Whaia te Maramatanga¹⁸ in alignment with the care regulations¹⁹.
- Swimming in the onsite pool, sport games within the gym
- Eponi Olympics
- Meditation activities
- Beauty regimes
- Leisure activities including art and crafts, games, cards
- Life skill programmes like budgeting and personal goal setting
- Table tennis
- Candle making
- Lego building
- Making cards for Father's Day
- Vibe (the local Youth One Stop Shop and health provider) facilitated a programme making lava lava.

During breaktimes in education and after school, kaimahi were observed engaging with mokopuna to keep them occupied with activities, and this included table tennis and playing cards. The programme co-ordinator meets regularly with the care team to map out programmes for the units on a three-weekly basis and has been doing significant mahi with community providers to bring them into the residence to run activities. Examples include working with Vibe to provide an alcohol and drug counsellor to work with mokopuna around the effects of substance use.

Since the April 2024 visit, off-site activities for mokopuna have also increased as part of the education and residence programme. During the September 2024 follow-up visit, Mana Mokopuna was able to see thorough risk assessments for off-site activities and acknowledge the work kaimahi are doing to ensure mokopuna continue to experience a variety of age-appropriate activities in the community, with the focus being calculated risk rather than exclusion.

Offsite activities have included, but are not limited to:²⁰

- Mokopuna attending boxing classes at a local boxing academy

¹⁷ Data provided by Oranga Tamariki from Monthly Quality Report Summaries (May-August 2024).

¹⁸ Process for mokopuna to make grievances

¹⁹ [Oranga Tamariki \(Residential Care\) Regulations 1996 \(SR 1996/354\) \(as at 01 July 2023\) 4 Right to be informed of certain matters – New Zealand Legislation](#)

²⁰ Data provided by Oranga Tamariki



- Cyberpunk Ninja physical exercise theme park
- Zealandia
- Brookfields
- Naenae police station visit
- Police museum
- Black Ferns training
- Rock climbing
- Ten pin bowling
- Parliament house tours
- Staglands wildlife reserve.

Education

At the time of this September visit, education was operating in both units and the majority of mokopuna were engaged and attending school regularly. The data provided by Oranga Tamariki across May-August 2024 for Epuni states that mokopuna attendance in education has regularly been over 90% and mokopuna are receiving five hours of education per day in accordance with the National Care Standards.²¹

Mana Mokopuna observed an education block after lunchtime where mokopuna were learning how to do dot art. Mokopuna appeared to be enjoying the activity and remained focused with good interactions between residence kaimahi and their Kaiako (teacher). The kaiako adapted the session for mokopuna and an example of this was modifying the art choices from animals to the Nike logo. This kept mokopuna engaged by allowing them to produce a piece of art they had investment in. The kaiako also quickly addressed any negative behaviours from mokopuna and would casually talk through with them the rationale as to why their behaviour was being corrected. Mokopuna were very responsive to this method because the kaiako kept conversations low-key and used language mokopuna could relate to. The relationship between the kaiako and mokopuna was well grounded and we observed that this mutual respect allowed mokopuna to enjoy the activities that took place at school.

In order to improve the relationship between the residence and the education provider²², the residence manager has implemented three weekly hui (which also includes Vibe) to strengthen communications and the partnerships between the stakeholders providing care for mokopuna.

²¹ [Oranga Tamariki \(National Care Standards and Related Matters\) Regulations 2018 \(LI 2018/111\) \(as at 01 May 2023\) 11 Process for assessing educational needs – New Zealand Legislation](#)

²² [Central Regional Health School \(crhs.school.nz\)](#)



Health Service delivery

Vibe Hutt Valley Youth Health Trust (Vibe)²³ have recently employed a new GP who is working in Epuni and bringing a fresh perspective to the health care needs of mokopuna in the residence. Vibe shared the following changes have occurred since the monitoring visit in April:

- Clinic is running daily without reduced hours which was how the service was operating before the safety concerns (as documented in the April monitoring report).
- Nurses are not having to always work in pairs (unless advised to or to give medical care such as immunisations). Residence kaimahi are responsive to correcting negative behaviours from mokopuna.
- Vibe engagement team of youth workers are delivering programmes in the residence during school such as screen printing of lava lavas, brief AOD sessions, and sessions in healthy relationships.
- Communication has improved with kaimahi working in the units, they are responsive and proactive in actioning medical appointments for mokopuna.
- Evidence of boundaries and routines are in place for mokopuna which is contributing to a better sense of safety.

Medication Errors

There has been a decrease in the number of medication errors that was highlighted as a concern during the monitoring visit in April. Errors occurring now are in relation to creams not being applied as opposed to prescription drugs not being given or not given on time.

There have been new processes adopted as a result of training being given by clinical staff in another Oranga Tamariki run residence and through discussions with the national clinical services manager. Practice changes include:

- Installing safes in each unit to store controlled medication.
- A TLO is required to provide the co-signing for the administration of medications.
- Daily audits by the residence Quality Lead are being completed in addition to the audits completed by Vibe.
- Vibe is scheduling in refresher training on medical administration for kaimahi.

There are still occasions where double signatories are not occurring when medications are dispensed.²⁴ An example of this was seen on this September visit when a few double signatures were not evident. These had been highlighted by the Quality Lead and then over-signed retrospective of the medication being dispensed. It was unclear if the retrospective signature was the person who dispensed.

Medication dispensing continues to be an area that requires close overview and improvement. Mana Mokopuna recommends that there is continued implementation and strong oversight of clear medication dispensing processes and practices, including a weekly audit by the Quality

²³ [Vibe](#)

²⁴ Sited via medication sign out sheets on-site at the residence during the September visit.



Lead and that this information is recorded in the residence progress plan to address the on-going medication errors.

Admissions to the facility

All kaimahi who spoke with us in September 2024 said that capping the number of mokopuna admissions into the facility has been beneficial to allow time to reset, engage in training, and build meaningful relationships with mokopuna. Only when the number of mokopuna is low and mokopuna are settled, can this type of reset occur.

However, over the past few months, mokopuna admissions into the facility have increased and there have been occasions where senior kaimahi have had very little notice that mokopuna are coming into Epuni, or very little detailed information when they do arrive. This is concerning, given that having key information about mokopuna and their specific situation and needs is crucial to ensure a smooth transition into the residence and to lay the foundation for their care at Epuni. Kaimahi said they are often not involved in decision making about who is coming into the residence as admissions are directed by Senior Leadership at Oranga Tamariki National Office. Many kaimahi noted how problematic this can be for the residence, as incoming mokopuna are presenting with very high and complex needs, and this alone requires thorough planning and often extensive supports needing to be put in place before mokopuna arrive.

Kaimahi noted the last three mokopuna admissions into the residence were not fully consulted on with senior leadership at National office and Epuni senior leadership and often the Leadership team are only given 24 to 48 hours' notice that mokopuna are being admitted to Epuni. There have also been recent admissions where mokopuna are experiencing mental distress or have been discharged directly from an adolescent mental health in-patient unit and have arrived at Epuni. This has often occurred with little accompanying information or briefing for Epuni kaimahi on how to manage these specific mokopuna needs, particularly given kaimahi said they are often not equipped to manage mental health needs to the degree they may need to for mokopuna.

Mokopuna who are experiencing mental health distress, unwellness, or dysregulation often require specialist care and support when being admitted into a secure care and protection facility. Kaimahi need to be trained, be prepared to mitigate risks, and be adept in safety planning in order to meet mokopuna holistic needs. It is also vital that the necessary communications and consultations can occur internally at Oranga Tamariki so that external partners, including health and education, can receive comprehensive information to tailor services and meet mokopuna care needs on arrival.

Mana Mokopuna recommends that a member of the senior leadership team at Epuni is involved in assessing new admissions for the residence and are provided with ample notice to plan and prepare existing mokopuna and kaimahi for admissions into the facility.

Refurbishments to the facility

Since April 2024, the facility had been freshly painted with pastel colours, the carpet had been replaced and was still in good condition and new artwork overlaid with perspex sheets had been installed on the walls to prevent scratching and etching. 'My Space'²⁵, where mokopuna can take time away from the group to regulate had been refurbished, with reusable 'colour me in' wall art, word searches and other activities on the walls that mokopuna could use with whiteboard markers.

The facility overall was clean and tidy, there was minimal etching or tagging in the units. Kaimahi advised there has been mixed reviews from mokopuna about the refurbishments with some liking it, while other mokopuna have described it as looking like a kindergarten.

The sensory room that is attached to the Secure Care unit has now been decommissioned, as it was not conducive to the therapeutic needs of mokopuna, and a new sensory room is being established within the classroom that can be utilised during the day but also after school hours.



Activities on the walls in My Space rooms mokopuna can utilise to help regulate.

Mana Mokopuna commends the responsiveness by Oranga Tamariki to begin addressing the state of the material conditions at the residence since our visit in April 2024. We recommend that addressing the conditions in secure care and the establishment of the sensory room for mokopuna are now prioritised, ensuring any future refurbishments have direct input from mokopuna in the planning and design stages, and that they and cater to the various ages and needs of mokopuna that stay in Epuni.



Newly painted kitchen, mokopuna bedrooms and artwork installed in one of the units

²⁵ An area next to the Secure Care that mokopuna can use to de-escalate and regulate.



Appendix One:

Gathering information

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

Method	Role
Interviews and informal discussions with mokopuna and kaimahi.	
Interviews and informal discussions with kaimahi and external stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Acting Residence Manager■ Manager Residence Operations■ Youth Workers■ Case Leaders■ Residential Quality Lead■ Team Leader Operations■ VOYCE – Whakarongo Mai■ Vibe Health■ Senior Leadership Hui
Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Grievance quarterly reports■ Oranga Tamariki Residence Action Plan■ Serious Event Notifications■ Incident reports■ Report of Concerns■ Secure care data■ Seized/Prohibited items register.■ Supervision Records■ Monthly Quality Report Summary (May-August 2024)■ Mokopuna list■ Use of Force data and reviews■ Current Staffing Numbers (including vacancies, inductees, leave and special leave).■ List of training kaimahi have undergone since April 2024
Observations and engagements with mokopuna	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Unit routines■ Education in the classroom■ Activities on-site■ Shift debrief and handover