



Kaahui Whetuu ki te Pito Care and Protection Residence

OPCAT Monitoring Follow-Up Report

Visit Date: 17 – 19 September 2024

Report Date: November 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 wellbeing, 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 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 follow-up visit to Kaahui Whetuu ki te Pito Care and Protection residence (Kaahui Whetuu) between 17 and 19 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.

About this report

The report outlines the progress made against the recommendations from our last full OPCAT Monitoring visit in September 2023. The report also highlights issues and concerns, as well as areas of strength and good practice observed during the visit.

About this facility

Facility Name: Kaahui Whetuu ki te Pito operated by Oranga Tamariki.
Region: National resource based in Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland
Operating capacity: Kaahui Whetuu is made up of one secure assessment hub, which is subject to OPCAT requirements, and two community where that fall outside of the designated scope. The hub has five beds and there were two mokopuna living in the hub at the time of the visit. The hub is situated on the same site as Whakatakapokai Youth Justice Residence. The two sites share a common reception area and the Whakatakapokai central compound can be seen on entering Kaahui Whetuu. Kaahui Whetuu does not have a secure perimeter fence and mokopuna largely access the building via a side gate, which leads directly into the residence front garden. The Kaahui Whetuu hub itself is made up of a kitchen/dining area as well as a large lounge with a television. There is a staff office, and the five bedrooms are off a corridor from the lounge. There is a large outside area with tables, a grassed area, and space for a netball hoop that mokopuna can access off the dining area. The Secure Care area has been informally decommissioned and is solely used as a storage area. Its current state is not fit for mokopuna care which is intentional to discourage any use.
Status under which mokopuna are detained: S78, 101, 110(2)(b), 139, and 140 Oranga Tamariki Act 1989.

Key Findings

Mana Mokopuna found no evidence of cruel, inhuman, degrading treatment or punishment (ill-treatment) during the visit to Kahui Whetuu ki te Pito.

The key findings from this follow-up visit are:

Issues:

- Key documentation requested from Oranga Tamariki was not sent to Mana Mokopuna at the time of completing the draft report. The information requested was sent over a period of time with the last of the documentation received on 25 February 2025 some five months after the completion of the onsite visit. Due to the lack of timeliness in receiving the information requested, most of what was received did not inform report findings.
- Oranga Tamariki kaimahi continue to advocate for the secure assessment hub to be removed from the Kaahui Whetuu programme in favour of an additional community-based where, as the vision of Kaahui Whetuu is to keep mokopuna within their communities and connected to community-based supports. Oranga Tamariki kaimahi are clear that the secure assessment hub does not fit into the Kaahui Whetuu programme

model of care and creates confusion when Oranga Tamariki are looking for secure Care and Protection residence beds.

- Kaimahi are asking for clarity in terms of the long-term strategic plan for the secure assessment hub.
- Mokopuna can and do regularly abscond from the hub, and this is creating pressure in the community when external stakeholders like the Police are attending multiple callouts per week due to mokopuna risk taking and complex behaviours.
- Mokopuna have access to personal cell phones in the hub and they are using these to keep in contact with peers in the community who have a negative influence over their behaviour. Mokopuna are also able to vape on the premises of the secure assessment hub, despite there being a rule that no vaping is allowed in the hub or the homes. This is inconsistent with the practice adopted in other residences across the Oranga Tamariki placement network and raises issues for mokopuna health.
- Mokopuna still do not consistently have access to age-appropriate education when living in the hub. There is no education provider available to deliver a structured learning day within the residence when mokopuna are not enrolled in courses or school in the community. This means mokopuna are not experiencing their right to education.
- Some kaimahi working in the hub do not feel heard or supported by their managers. Team Leaders and the Residence Manager are based off-site and kaimahi feel communication breakdowns happen frequently because they do not have easy access to line managers.
- Kaimahi have identified training gaps and require on-going and regular training to meet mokopuna needs. Gaps identified are in the areas of adolescent mental health support and continuous learning to grow trauma-informed practice approaches.
- Professional supervision for all kaimahi working in the hub is critical to ensuring consistent, high-quality practice. Kaimahi working directly with mokopuna do not have regular access to this support and some kaimahi have identified a need for clinical supervision.
- Mokopuna should have access to activities based in their community. At the time of the visit, there was no budget for mokopuna to engage in funded activities and kaimahi were supplementing free activities out of their own pocket. This included buying kai for mokopuna and using personal gym (guest access) cards so that mokopuna could go to the gym. More needs to be done to fulfil the right of mokopuna to rest, leisure, recreation, and play.

Areas of good practice and opportunity:

- It was evident that all kaimahi involved in the care of mokopuna often go above and beyond for them and operate within a trauma-informed framework. Mana Mokopuna saw and heard many kaimahi openly telling mokopuna they mattered and observed that they treated them like their own whānau.
- Secure care is not used in the hub. Kaimahi rely on their relational practice to help mokopuna de-escalate when required. Kaimahi work hard to establish trust and confidence with mokopuna. Secure care signage has been removed and the area is purposely used for storage to further discourage use.
- There is opportunity to increase the accessibility of culturally based programmes and activities for mokopuna. Kaimahi are eager to share their skills and knowledge, and this could be better supported by Oranga Tamariki through resourcing and providing a dedicated space for mokopuna to engage in the carving programme.

Recommendations

Additional recommendations (following on from recommendations made in 2023) resulting from findings from this 2024 follow-up visit:

2024 Systemic recommendations for Oranga Tamariki

	Recommendation
1	Provide clarity in terms of the strategic direction for Kaahui Whetuu moving forward. It is important kaimahi know with some certainty whether Kaahui Whetuu will continue as a Care and Protection residence or be repurposed to provide something different within the residence network.
2	Finalise the Standard Operating Procedures for Oranga Tamariki residences with urgency, to ensure consistency of practice across all residences. Be clear about when the Residential Care Regulations 1996 apply and when they do not.
3	Urgently address the lack of education delivered in the hub, so that all mokopuna can experience their right to education by accessing education appropriate to their age and to support their development.



2024 Facility Recommendations for Kaahui Whetuu

	Recommendation
1	Ensure all kaimahi working directly with mokopuna have access to regular, external professional supervision. Clinical supervision should also be available to kaimahi who identify a specific need.
2	The Residence Manager ring-fences a monthly budget amount to support community-based activity for mokopuna and regular resource upgrade (like games and DVDs) for mokopuna.
3	Ensure kaimahi receive regular, on-going training focused on development needs that are self-identified to help better equip them to care for mokopuna. Examples raised by kaimahi include training in mental health for adolescents and training to enhance their trauma-informed practice approach.
4	Investigate ways to increase mokopuna access to cultural programmes and activities, especially the carving programme and associated equipment already purchased.

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 Kaahui Whetuu which Mana Mokopuna has found during this monitoring visit in September 2024. Where relevant, these are highlighted throughout the body of the 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](#)

Issues and Concerns

Our monitoring visit to Kaahui Whetuu found no evidence of ill-treatment or harm.

There are, however, some operational and practice issues, which impact the care that mokopuna receive at Kaahui Whetuu.

In addition, Mana Mokopuna requested supporting documentation from Oranga Tamariki which was not received during the analysis or drafting phase of this report. Due to not having the information requested, findings for the report have been based on information gathered via onsite interviews and observations only.

The following information was requested:

- Mokopuna list with admission date into Kaahui Whetuu, ethnicity, custody status.
- Incident reports from January 2024 to current
- All About Me (AAMP) plans (including behaviour management plans)
- 120-day plan/current residence plan.
- Kaimahi training schedule for the last three months.

Some of the above listed information was received on 22 and 23 January 2025, the exception being the incident reporting which was received on 25 February 2025. As stated above, due to the information arriving over five months after the visit, it did not inform the findings contained in this report.

Mana Mokopuna requested the following documentation, however Oranga Tamariki advised that there was no paperwork to provide:

- Documentation around vaping and phones - use of these in residence. *Oranga Tamariki advised that Standard Operating Procedures are yet to be finalised and drafts were not supplied.*
- Documentation around the padlock being used on the main gate (including risk matrix for H&S). *No paperwork exists and the use of this padlock was in response to mokopuna escalating risk of death or misadventure in the community.*

The residence does not fit within the Kaahui Whetuu programme vision

The Kaahui Whetuu programme is built around community-based intervention

The Kaahui Whetuu programme is built around two community-based whare and the Kaahui Whetuu assessment hub (the latter being what Mana Mokopuna has monitored in this follow-

up OPCAT monitoring visit). Kaimahi from all areas of operations of the facility told Mana Mokopuna that the original vision for the residence was a short-term assessment hub that mokopuna could transition through, before moving to community-based placements in one of the two community-based whare. Key assessments could take place in hub and comprehensive plans for mokopuna could be made that detail behavioural needs, key support mechanisms and any on-going specialist assessments that required follow-up. However, this vision has not been realised and the hub is instead often used for emergency placements or as an alternative, longer-term care and protection placement for mokopuna who are not settling well into the community whare and require more support to maintain appropriate behaviour patterns before transitioning back into the community.

The Kaahui Whetuu Care and Protection residence is not as secure as other residences in that there is low perimeter fencing and mokopuna regularly come and go to access services in the community. However, kaimahi said they believed mokopuna with high-risk behaviours⁵ are being placed in the assessment hub on the premise that it is more secure than a community-based whare, but the reality is that mokopuna are able to abscond with ease. Some kaimahi said there is a national pressure for secure Care and Protection beds as there are not enough available and there seems to be a lack of understanding from external stakeholders of the physical limitations of the Kaahui Whetuu residence in terms of keeping mokopuna within its confines. Keeping mokopuna in a locked facility conflicts with the programme vision of Kaahui Whetuu. Kaimahi said the word 'residence' is misleading for them and continues to muddy the waters of what they are trying to achieve and what is realistic to deliver.

All kaimahi who spoke with Mana Mokopuna said they would prefer not to have the hub as part of their programme and want to be supporting mokopuna in the community whare. The physical environment of the hub does not provide congruency to the therapeutic intervention kaimahi are trying to provide, which in turn does not allow the programme to reach its full potential. Kaimahi also explained the original intent for the residence was to operate as an assessment hub resourced with professionals such as a psychologist and an occupational therapist, however this did not eventuate. The unanimous feeling from kaimahi who spoke to Mana Mokopuna was that additional community-based placements in small, bespoke whare would be better suited to the vision of the Kaahui Whetuu programme, rather than a secure residential facility.

Mokopuna are regularly absconding – creating operational pressures for residence kaimahi and external stakeholders

Due to the hub not being secure, mokopuna are easily able to climb external fences and leave the residence. Whilst kaimahi try their very best to dissuade mokopuna from leaving, the

⁵ Recent admissions into Kaahui Whetuu included mokopuna who were self-harming, had intellectual disability, and intergenerational trauma.

frequency with which the absconding events are happening is causing tension between Oranga Tamariki and responders like the Police. Kaimahi said the Police have expressed reaching their limit in terms of continually responding to absconding and self-harm incidents by mokopuna who should be safe in the hub. Kaimahi are feeling like they do not have the support of the Police is causing anxiety for kaimahi, as mokopuna care needs are exceeding what can be safely provided at Kaahui Whetuu, and because of this, they are aware that the mokopuna will likely be transferred to another Care and Protection residence.

In an attempt to curb the absconding, the Residence Manager had authorisation from Oranga Tamariki National office to install a large padlock to be used overnight on the main gate that mokopuna use to leave the hub. Kaimahi and mokopuna at the hub were dismissive of this attempt to stop mokopuna absconding, saying that they will simply climb a lower wall towards the rear of the property. Kaimahi also questioned the health and safety aspect of having the padlock, due to the possible inability for kaimahi and mokopuna to exit the immediate grounds of the residence in an emergency. As one kaimahi said, *"I now have to have the car keys, Hoffman knife, and padlock key lined up and ready to go when one of them [mokopuna] takes off."* All kaimahi were worried for the safety of mokopuna when they abscond due to the high-risk behaviours they engage in and self-harming behaviours. Kaimahi reiterated a need to ensure mokopuna are in a safe environment with adequate support for their wellbeing.

On a practical level, kaimahi also spoke about the challenges of having only two kaimahi based in the hub and multiple mokopuna. At the time of the visit there were two mokopuna and two kaimahi rostered on shifts. When mokopuna abscond, a kaimahi must follow if it is safe to do so in an attempt to bring them home.⁶ However, kaimahi were open about challenges when this happens, particularly, for example, when there are male kaimahi working on shift and they either need to follow female mokopuna or have to stay alone in the residence with female mokopuna. This was also an issue when one mokopuna was accompanied by a kaimahi off-site whilst others remained on-site. Kaimahi were open in saying they felt vulnerable when put in these situations and acknowledged mokopuna may also not feel comfortable with only a male in the residence.

Managing situations as described above emphasises the need for Oranga Tamariki to establish where this residence fits in the care and protection placement continuum. Kaimahi emphasised that more and more mokopuna are presenting with very high and complex needs who are struggling to manage in the community in the care of whānau or other community homes due to the lack of support and resourcing available. Mokopuna are also staying for longer periods of time in the assessment hub and community homes. Kaimahi are keen to understand how they can add value to the care and protection placement network and want to make it clear that if the residence is to continue as a Care and Protection residence, it needs to be fit-for-

⁶ [Working with tamariki and rangatahi who are missing, or whose absence is unauthorised | Practice Centre | Oranga Tamariki](#)

purpose and staffed appropriately. Kaimahi describe the hub like that of a half-way facility - not quite a home, and not quite a residence, and said decisions around its future need to happen sooner rather than later to provide clarity and strategic direction. Kaimahi advocated for the residence to become part of the neighboring youth justice residence and if that was not going to happen, for it to be resourced appropriately with staffing, education and an extensive refurbishment that includes a fully functional sensory room.

Application of the Residential Care Regulations is sporadic and confusing

The Kaahui Whetuu facility is a residence designated under s364 of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989. Therefore, the Residential Care Regulations 1996 (The Regulations) apply in terms of governing operations of the residence. Our observations during this follow-up monitoring visit were that these Regulations were being applied inconsistently and when asked why this was, most kaimahi expressed the desire for the hub to mirror operations in the community whare (where the Regulations do not apply). Examples include allowing mokopuna to use their personal cell phones, not carrying out room searches despite knowing mokopuna had contraband like vapes in their possession, and when mokopuna did want to vape, some kaimahi facilitated this by designating an area where mokopuna could vape outside but within the confines of the residence. Some kaimahi were very vocal about vaping not being allowed, whilst others were complacent about allowing it, using the rationale that many mokopuna already vape regularly in the community regardless.

The Regulations and proposed Standard Operating Procedures⁷ do not allow mokopuna to have access to cell phones nor are they able to vape. Kaimahi said they choose not conduct room searches for contraband, which further perpetuated the cycle of mokopuna bringing vapes into the facility, having acquired them when participating in activities in the community or being supplied them by friends and whānau. Kaimahi said that even if they did remove the contraband, mokopuna would simply access replacements when next in the community.

Most kaimahi said they prefer to keep the hub operating like a whare in the community, explaining that mokopuna can have phones in their normal lives, so kaimahi want this to carry this on in the residence and teach appropriate use and establish trust with the device, rather than confiscate them. Mana Mokopuna appreciates the relational practice kaimahi use with mokopuna to establish trust and confidence, however, the health and wellbeing of mokopuna needs to take priority. Vaping has known adverse health effects⁸ and social media was brought

⁷ On advice from Oranga Tamariki, Standard Operating Procedures are currently being drafted, however Mana Mokopuna received advice that cell phones and vapes are not permitted in residences across the Oranga Tamariki network.

⁸ Examples of research include but is not limited to: Nicholas Chadi, Ellie Vyver, Richard E Bélanger, Protecting children and adolescents against the risks of vaping, *Paediatrics & Child Health*, Volume 26, Issue 6, October 2021, Pages 358–365; Galderisi, A, Agnese Ferraro, V, Caserotti, M, Quareni, L, Perilongo, G and Baraldi, E, Protecting youth from the vaping epidemic, *Pediatric Allergy and Immunology*, Volume 31, Issue S26, November 2020, Pages 66–68; Jude Ball et al, [Youth vaping addiction: How it happens and why it matters | PHCC](#), January 2024; Anna

up as being detrimental for mokopuna in the residence. Cell phones were being used as a way for mokopuna to keep in contact with peers outside the hub who are reportedly having a negative influence over their behaviour.

Mana Mokopuna recommends residences operate with consistency across the Oranga Tamariki network, and that practice is aligned with the expectations for residences as set out in the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 and the Residential Care Regulations 1996. Updated Standard Operating Procedures need to be finalised and distributed to all Care and Protection residences to ensure consistency of practice and care experience for mokopuna. This is especially important given mokopuna can and do move regularly between facilities.

Consistency in leadership, communication, and expectations is necessary to ensure quality care

Consistent leadership creates certainty for both mokopuna and kaimahi

There has been a series of changes for the role of Residence Manager at Kaahui Whetuu and currently a Team Leader (TLO) is acting in this role. This has created a knock-on effect as other kaimahi are either required to act up to backfill roles or colleagues are required to pick up additional mahi to ensure operations continue. Many kaimahi said the changing approaches in leadership style has created uncertainty for them, and this has been especially stressful given the wider organisational restructures occurring at Oranga Tamariki at the time of the visit.

For example, roles that were vacant had been removed from the organisation structure, despite being vital for residence operations. Many kaimahi identified a programme co-ordinator as a current gap for the Kaahui Whetuu programme, and this was something that kaimahi were disappointed to see had been removed from the structure and therefore could not be filled. It is difficult to lead a team through change, keep morale high, and ensure smooth programme operations moving forward when there are alternating acting managers and multiple kaimahi backfilling roles or stretching themselves across roles to provide cover.

Mana Mokopuna acknowledges there were resource issues for the Kaahui Whetuu programme at the time of the visit relating to the Oranga Tamariki restructure. Managers were uncertain what their budgets for the financial year were, and when they could expect to receive access to this funding.

Communication lines need to be strengthened across all teams

The lack of stability and sometimes accessibility to members of the leadership team for kaimahi working directly with mokopuna has led to communication breakdowns in the hub. Kaimahi said that Team Leaders do not come into the hub as often as they would like. Kaimahi

Graham-DeMello et al, Lived experiences of stigma and altered self-perceptions among young people who are addicted to ENDS: a qualitative study from Aotearoa New Zealand (2024).

described their management team as working in the “ivory tower⁹”, reinforcing how isolated they feel, working separately in the residence. Other kaimahi outlined that due to a lack of visibility from leaders, they feel unheard and unsupported. For example, kaimahi said they would provide information regarding mokopuna care plans, dynamics in the residence and solutions to problems, and kaimahi felt these were often questioned and overlooked by the residence leadership team. Kaimahi said that amendments to care plans have been made that do not take into account what kaimahi were advising based on their day-to-day interactions with mokopuna.

Good communication and kaimahi support are the key to consistent care for mokopuna. Mana Mokopuna encourages the Kaahui Whetuu leadership team to regularly engage with kaimahi in the hub so that communications are strong, clear, consistent, and decision-making regarding mokopuna plans are relevant to meet mokopuna care needs.

Kaimahi need more training and support to care for mokopuna in the hub

Kaimahi were very open about the challenges of having mokopuna in the hub with very high and complex needs. Many kaimahi were explicit in outlining they did not have the training or feel like they had support from management when it came to looking after some mokopuna. Behaviours relating to self-harm have been a common occurrence over the past few months, and kaimahi said they lacked the skills to unpack this with mokopuna, help them to navigate their trauma, and provide the safe environment they needed. Kaimahi said they needed to rely heavily on their relational practice to work with mokopuna, but sometimes, this was not enough, given the level of specialist professional capability and skill required. Kaimahi said that they appreciated the training they did have access to, however, indicated that they needed specific training around supporting mokopuna with mental health challenges, as well as continuous and regular training to support their trauma-informed practice approaches.

Supervision is key to practice consistency and kaimahi wellbeing

Kaimahi said they do not always feel supported when mokopuna behaviours become too much for them to safely manage. Some kaimahi expressed feeling anxious coming to mahi knowing they would need to deal with specific behaviours from certain mokopuna. Kaimahi said they often worry that mokopuna will complete self-harm attempts (whether accidentally or intentionally) on their shifts and told Mana Mokopuna that they (kaimahi) have experienced nightmares relating to these fears. Kaimahi said when these concerns have been raised to managers, their concerns have been brushed off with suggestions kaimahi need to build resilience, with one kaimahi saying *“if we have any emotions, we just have to deal with it”*.

⁹ The management team which includes Team Leader Operations, Team Leader Clinical Practice and the Residence Manager operate out of the Homai Oranga Tamariki site and are not based in the Kaahui Whetuu residence.

Kaimahi said they “often took mahi home with them” due to stress and not always having managers who show support and understanding. It is important that kaimahi working in the residence always receive good wrap-around support and can have access to clinical supervision when working with high-risk mokopuna.

Kaimahi said that supervision for them is generally in the form of de-briefs after major events, such as serious assaults that occur due to mokopuna dysregulation. Day-to-day supervision often occurs as peer supervision and is more commonly centred around venting and providing collegial manaaki rather than professional supervision. Whilst there is an office day supervision, kaimahi said not everyone can attend and when they can, kaimahi said it feels as though they are only just catching their managers on the fly or as they are walking out the door, rather than feeling actively supported. Some kaimahi did say they had good relationships with their Team Leaders and could reach out to them regularly. However, other kaimahi said having Team Leaders based away from the hub made it difficult to sustain quality relationships when they were not often seeing them. Overall, kaimahi feedback centred around desiring consistent practical support and regular well-being check-ins, rather than only having supervision after adverse events.

Mana Mokopuna recommends that all kaimahi working directly with mokopuna have access to regular, external, professional supervision and wrap-around supports. Clinical supervision should also be available to kaimahi who identify a specific need.

The lack of an education provider for the facility continues to cause significant concern

Kaahui Whetuu does not have an education provider to deliver a structured school day on-site. If mokopuna are not attending a course or school in the community, mokopuna do not have access to a formal education. This means mokopuna are missing out on their right to education under Article 28 of the Children’s Convention,¹⁰ which requires that States Parties including New Zealand need to ensure education is accessible to all children and supports their development and learning.

At the time of the visit, one mokopuna was engaged in a local Polytech course, and kaimahi supported them to attend by dropping them off in the morning and picking them up again in the afternoon. This mokopuna was also able to stay overnight with their nan, and this happened during the monitoring visit with kaimahi continuing to provide transportation to Polytech.

However, another mokopuna was not enrolled in school and did not attend any form of education. This mokopuna instead had a mentor that they spent up to eight hours a day with three times per week. The mokopuna did not articulate to our monitoring team what kind of activities they did together apart from them having lunch at the local McDonalds. It was

¹⁰ [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

unclear how this mokopuna spent the remaining two days of the week in the residence, apart from spending time with professionals such as a dedicated mental health nurse.

Kaimahi said that they could no longer use the local Kingslea School satellite hub as the residence was treated as a community referral and did not get preferential treatment for mokopuna based at Kaahui Whetuu to attend. This has left a significant gap in service delivery of education for mokopuna within the residence, and as a result, mokopuna are falling through the cracks of the education system and their right to education is failing to be upheld by Oranga Tamariki.

Mana Mokopuna recommends that Oranga Tamariki urgently addresses the lack of education delivered at the hub, and finds an immediate solution, whether that is with Kingslea School or looking into an NGO such as TYMS¹¹, so that mokopuna can access an education appropriate to their age and which supports their learning and development.

Kaimahi are expected to run the hub like a home, however limited funding is impacting on activities available to mokopuna

Across the board it was evident that kaimahi working in the hub wanted to provide the very best care for mokopuna. Many kaimahi commented that they treat the mokopuna as if they are their own whānau and want to give them experiences their own mokopuna have access to.

However, due to financial restraint measures within Oranga Tamariki, kaimahi have been advised by their leadership team and senior leadership at Oranga Tamariki National office that outings with mokopuna are to be cost neutral and not set mokopuna up with unrealistic expectations in terms of what they could experience when they return to whānau.

Kaimahi expressed frustration at this sentiment as they explained mokopuna coming into the hub have had traumatic upbringings and adverse childhood experiences, and kaimahi feel it is unfair that mokopuna in state custody cannot have access to regular childhood activities.

Kaimahi gave examples of mokopuna going to the beach, but there being no funding for ice-creams or going for drives, and not being able to buy some hot chips to share. Kaimahi said they take mokopuna to the local night markets, but there can be a lack of budget to buy kai. Kaimahi explained these are the things they do with their own mokopuna and mokopuna in residence should not miss out, so kaimahi often fund these extras out of their own pockets.

Kaimahi also explained that mokopuna gym access has been through using their personal gym (guest access) memberships and if this did not happen, mokopuna would not have access to the local gym. At the time of the visit, the school holidays were approaching, and kaimahi said at that point in time, they were unaware if there was a plan or budget for activities for this

¹¹ TYMS - Tuilaepa Youth Mentoring Services is a well-known service in Tāmaki Makaurau that currently delivers the education components in many of the remand homes based in the region. Their programme is adaptable for short-stays and could be a good fit for Kaahui Whetuu.

period. Kaimahi reiterated many times that they did not want to take mokopuna to expensive places every week, but wanted to provide a homely environment where mokopuna can experience everyday things with people who care about them.

Kaimahi are passionate about providing positive, pro-social experiences in the community for mokopuna living in the residence. All kaimahi supported the idea of treating mokopuna like their own in an environment that was akin to a home. However, not having an adequate budget to support age-appropriate activities and resources during the week, school holidays or for special occasions like Christmas and birthdays does not help to create this environment. Kaimahi said having things like an abundance of Christmas decorations or the budget to make a fuss of mokopuna on their birthday helps to provide a whānau feel to the residence. Kaimahi want to send the message to mokopuna that they are taonga worth investing in.

Mana Mokopuna recommends Kaahui Whetuu ring-fences monthly funding to support community-based activity for mokopuna and that resources within the residence are regularly updated such as DVDs and games. This will help to support mokopuna to experience their right to rest, leisure, recreation and play under Article 31 of the Children's Convention.

Areas of good practice and opportunity

Kaahui Whetuu aspires to uphold a trauma-informed and relational model of care

Trauma-informed practice is evident, although needs scaffolding through comprehensive and on-going training

It is evident that trauma-informed practice is occurring at Kaahui Whetuu and kaimahi are actively demonstrating a relational model of care in the way they engage with mokopuna. Whilst kaimahi were able to speak to different elements of trauma-informed care, they also expressed that they need and want more training, and need this delivered in a manner that makes sense to them and training that is applicable to their day-to-day practice.

Throughout the visit, it was clear there was a lot of aroha between kaimahi and mokopuna residing at Kahui Whetuu. Kaimahi regularly noted that they treat these mokopuna as if they are their own, and that was apparent from the interactions observed during the visit. Kaimahi openly said they care for mokopuna and want the best for them. One mokopuna referred to kaimahi as 'Nan' with their interactions very much replicating that of a Nan and her mokopuna. For example, kaimahi giving instructions to mokopuna in te reo Māori, and giving good natured 'growlings' to keep their room tidy and sending them back to do a better job before leaving for course. There was also banter and words of wisdom for mokopuna as they explored

romantic connections, empowering mokopuna to make good decisions, and ensuring mokopuna knew where to come to for support from those responsible for their care and protection.

Kaimahi appeared to know the mokopuna in the residence very well and could use this knowledge to build trust and confidence. All kaimahi working with mokopuna could articulate mokopuna backgrounds and challenges they had faced up until coming to live at Kaahui Whetuu. This knowledge and trauma-informed approach allowed kaimahi to see when mokopuna were triggered and could appropriately de-escalate mokopuna when needed, however more training is needed to support mokopuna who self-harm.

Mana Mokopuna recommends kaimahi receive regular, on-going, trauma-informed training to support the excellent work they currently do with and for mokopuna.

Secure Care is not used at Kaahui Whetuu

Positively, Secure Care has essentially been decommissioned in this residence and is now used as a storage area. In line with their trauma-informed practice, kaimahi were proud to not be using secure care, and said using the Secure Care space as a storage area deters use, as there is nowhere to place mokopuna even if kaimahi wanted to.

The signage indicating the secure care area had been removed, and this was also purposely done to reinforce to mokopuna that the practice is not used at Kaahui Whetuu.

Kaimahi again reiterated the vital role relational practice plays in how the residence operates, and kaimahi could provide good examples of how they de-escalate mokopuna by relying on the solid foundation they had created to build trust. Due to this strong foundation established between kaimahi and mokopuna, the use of restraint holds was also very limited in the hub, with response escalations when they were used, being based on kaimahi training via the Crisis Prevention Institute¹² programme.

Mana Mokopuna commends the Kaahui Whetuu leadership team for taking ownership of eliminating the use of secure care from their programme. It would be good to have this approach officially recognised by Oranga Tamariki, and kaimahi continue to be supported with quality trauma-informed training to keep secure care closed. There are learnings from the work of Kaahui Whetuu in this space that should be supported at the system-wide level by Oranga Tamariki, so that the use of Secure Care in care and protection residences can be completely eliminated, to uphold the rights and wellbeing of mokopuna.

¹² [Safety Intervention Foundation Training | Crisis Prevention Institute \(CPI\)](#)

There is an opportunity for te ao and matauranga Māori to be better integrated into residence operations

Kaimahi are willing to share their skills, but need better support from Oranga Tamariki

Kaahui Whetuu have a Kaiwhakaako (cultural advisor) who works across the Kaahui Whetuu programme. The primary responsibility of this role is to uphold the kawa and tikanga associated with the Kaahui Whetuu programme and support kaimahi to increase their capabilities in working with mokopuna Māori. The Kaiwhakaako leads Pōwhiri and Whakatau and encourages kaimahi to use their reo Māori whenever they can.

The Kaiwhakaako is a skilled carver and enjoys sharing their passions and skills with kaimahi and mokopuna alike. The monitoring team were shown examples of toi whakairo (carving) work completed by mokopuna on the Kaahui Whetuu programme. This included bone carvings for whānau and friends, and the Kaiwhakaako was explicit in explaining the meaning behind the designs and how this is passed on to mokopuna with a printout of the information so they can share it when they present their work to recipients. The Kaiwhakaako was also intending to work with one of the current mokopuna to repair some of the tukutuku panels in the wharehau based on-site at the residence. There is no shortage of passion, however holding the sole tagged Māori role across a site of two whare and a residence is a heavy responsibility, and the Kaiwhakaako is worried about succession planning to ensure this role carries on for years to come and is sustained and embedded into the programme.

It is worth noting that Kaahui Whetuu can support mokopuna to set up their own carving enterprises if they wish. The Kaiwhakaako was able to show Mana Mokopuna an itinerary of equipment purchased for a mokopuna who had returned to whānau so they could sell their carvings at the local market. The Kaiwhakaako wanted to instil pride in culture and arts and show mokopuna how they can use their skills and knowledge to stay on the right path, and even earn some money through their toi whakairo.

Mokopuna within the Kaahui Whetuu programme are also supported to visit their marae and immerse themselves in as much ao Māori as possible, and this includes the opportunity to speak te reo Māori in the residence. Mana Mokopuna recommends that there is a further opportunity for all kaimahi to be supported to uphold and use te reo Māori within the residence, as this was only observed amongst Māori kaimahi.

There is huge resource and capability amongst kaimahi working within the Kaahui Whetuu programme. There is equipment available to run a comprehensive carving programme (currently sitting idle in a shipping container in the community) if the appropriate premises are available to run this from. This is dependent on Oranga Tamariki National Office support.

Mana Mokopuna recommends that Oranga Tamariki increases the support and access to these cultural programmes and opportunities, so that mokopuna Māori can experience their right to culture through kaimahi being supported and resourced effectively to bring their unique skills to mahi and to share their mātauranga with mokopuna. In turn, this will also support the learning and development of mokopuna.

Appendix One

Progress on 2023 recommendations

The below table provides an assessment of OPCAT Monitoring recommendations made in the previous September 2023 OPCAT monitoring report to Kaahui Whetuu ki te Pito. Mana Mokopuna acknowledges that work on systemic recommendations is being led at a National Office level. The progress detailed here relates only to the day-to-day operations of this facility.

2023 System Recommendations

	2023 Recommendation	Progress as at September 2024
1	Close the secure assessment hub to enable full implementation of a trauma-informed, community-based model that has input from mokopuna, their whānau, hāpu and iwi	No progress: This recommendation came directly from kaimahi during the 2023 visit. The overwhelming kōrero across all kaimahi operations remains that the residence should be repurposed and not used as a Care and Protection residence within the Kaahui Whetuu programme. The residence remains outside of the vision for community-based placements for mokopuna who need to be placed away from whānau for a period of time. However, in 2024, the residence remains part of the Kaahui Whetuu programme and kaimahi continue to advocate for its re-purpose.
2	Ensure that if mokopuna are placed in the secure Kaahui Whetuu ki te Pito facility, they have access to education as is their right under the Children's Convention.	No progress: Whilst one mokopuna had a solid education plan attending a Polytech course in the community, the other mokopuna residing at Kaahui Whetuu at the time of the visit was not participating in education despite having been at the residence for months. Mana Mokopuna remains concerned that there is no education provider available to deliver a structured programme in the facility as is their right under the Children's Convention.
3	Continue the elimination of use of force and secure care at Kaahui Whetuu ki te Pito.	Good progress: Kaimahi at Kaahui Whetuu continue to not use secure care for mokopuna. The signage has been removed and the area is used purely for storage. Mokopuna cannot and do not use the current area for secure care. The use of restraints is limited at Kaahui Whetuu and Mana Mokopuna encourages kaimahi to continue minimising the use of restraints.

2023 Facility Recommendations

	2023 Recommendation	Progress as at September 2024
1	Re-establish a positive workplace culture and develop trust between Youth Workers and the facility leadership team to promote the wellbeing of kaimahi	Limited progress: Kaimahi working directly with mokopuna said they can feel isolated and unsupported working in the hub. At times they do not feel heard by their team leaders and managers, and this has been demonstrated through care plans for mokopuna being amended despite recommendations from the kaimahi working with mokopuna suggesting alternative ideas or solutions. There remains a 'them and us' mentality across the programme with kaimahi sharing they feel their managers sit in an "ivory tower" and sometimes do little to support kaimahi when they ask for help.
2	Maintain consistent training days to support kaimahi as they work across the three sites for Kaahui Whetuu ki te Pito	Some progress: Mana Mokopuna heard that training has been disrupted and not all kaimahi are able to access training days. Given the high and complex needs that mokopuna are presenting with in the residence, kaimahi have asked for more training to support their work in mental health, and to continue to grow their trauma-informed practice. Kaimahi said they appreciate the training they currently get, but would like more of it, and presented in a manner that relates to them and how they practice.
3	Ensure kaimahi have access to regular supervision to establish consistent practice across all sites for Kaahui Whetuu ki te Pito	Limited progress: Mana Mokopuna heard that supervision access was still inconsistent and mainly focused on event debriefs when there had been, for an example, assaults on kaimahi. Kaimahi shared that they engage in peer supervision, but that this is largely a space for kaimahi to vent, rather than structured professional supervision. There are dedicated supervision days for kaimahi, however the nature of the job often means kaimahi feel they are catching their managers on the 'fly' or as they head out the door. Some kaimahi expressed they were struggling with their wellbeing given the current mokopuna in the residence and were taking their worries home with them. Mana Mokopuna is recommending regular, external professional supervision for all kaimahi working directly with mokopuna and the ability to access clinical supervision should kaimahi identify a need.
4	Integrate the use of the carving equipment into the activity programme across the Kaahui Whetuu ki te Pito programme	Limited progress: The Kaiwhakaako is delivering 1:1 sessions with mokopuna across the programme (both in the whare and in the residence). However, the bulk of the equipment remains in the container and there is no regular group programme available to mokopuna due to lack of appropriate premises to deliver this. Many mokopuna show huge talent in the area of carving and Kaahui Whetuu have the ability to support those individuals with equipment to carry on this passion when they return home. More could be done to increase connection to te ao and mātauranga Māori and this could be achieved using the skills and passions that kaimahi working in the facility have to share.

Appendix Two

Gathering information

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

Method	Role
Interviews and informal discussions with mokopuna.	
Interviews and informal discussions with staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residence Manager Team Leader Operations (TLO) Team Leader Clinical Practice (TLCP) Kaiwhakaako Shift leaders Residential youth workers
Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grievance Quarterly Reports Serious Event Notification forms (supplied via monthly bundles from Oranga Tamariki National Office) MySafety information (supplied via monthly bundles from Oranga Tamariki National Office) Admission plans and Interim Safety Plans Therapeutic Response Plan Electronic daily shift notes. <p>Requested and received on 22 and 23 January 2025:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mokopuna list with admission date into Kaahui Whetuu, ethnicity, custody status. AAMP plans (including behaviour management plans). 120 day plan/ current residence plan. Training schedule for the last three months. <p>Requested and received on 25 February 2025:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incident reports from January 2024 to October 2024 <p>Requested the following however Oranga Tamariki acknowledged there was no paperwork to provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation around vaping and phones - use in residence. Standard Operating Procedures are yet to be finalised and were not provided. Documentation around the padlock (including risk matrix for H&S). No paperwork and was in response to mokopuna escalating risk of death or misadventure in the community.
Observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mokopuna and kaimahi interactions – morning and afternoon shifts Mokopuna interactions with professionals