

Whakatakapokai Youth Justice Residence

OPCAT Monitoring Report

Visit date: 20-22 May 2025

Report date: August 2025



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.

Please note that in this report, for clarity, we use the term 'mokopuna' to describe a group of young people, and 'tamaiti' for an individual.



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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, under the age of 25. We note that as of 01 August 2025 due to legislative change, Mana Mokopuna - Children and Young People's Commission became Mana Mokopuna - Children's Commissioner. We maintain the same OPCAT designation. Given this OPCAT Monitoring visit took place prior to the change to our legislation, we do refer to Mana Mokopuna - Children and Young People's Commission in this report

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 a full unannounced visit to Whakatakopokai Youth Justice Residence (Whakatakopokai) between 20-22 May 2025 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

This report shares the findings from the monitoring visit and recommends actions to address any issues identified. The report outlines the quality of mokopuna experience at the facility and provides evidence of the findings based on information gathered before, during, and after the visit.

About this facility

Facility Name:	Whakatakapokai Youth Justice Residence operated by Oranga Tamariki.
Region:	Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland)
Operating capacity:	15 bed capacity - Whakatakapokai is made up of two units, where mokopuna live. These contain, bedrooms, bathrooms, a dining area, kitchenette, television room and rooms for mokopuna to regulate and have phone calls. At the time of the visit, one of the units was under refurbishment with the other due to start soon. There were 9 male mokopuna on-site at the time of the visit.
Status under which mokopuna are detained: s238(1)(d) and s311 of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 and s173, s174 (females only) and s175 of the Criminal Procedure Act 2011.	

Key Findings

Mana Mokopuna found no evidence of cruel, inhuman, degrading treatment or punishment (ill-treatment) during the visit to Whakatakapokai. Mana Mokopuna acknowledges the swift follow-up response by Oranga Tamariki to the findings from our last February 2024 monitoring visit at the same facility which did detail ill-treatment. Progress has been made by the residence in terms of improving operations since our 2024 visit, however, based on this visit in 2025, Mana Mokopuna’s assessment is that there is still a long way to go in order to fully ensure mokopuna safety in Whakatakapokai.

Areas of concern:

- As at the time of the OPCAT Monitoring visit, the residence is still adjusting to a new management team. Many kaimahi said the residence leaders are not working as a team and there are communication breakdowns that are impacting daily operations.
- As at the time of the OPCAT Monitoring visit, Mana Mokopuna notes a rising trend in secure care admissions and instances where force is used on mokopuna within the residence.
 - The grounds for secure care admissions are not always clear, with some kaimahi who work in the residence questioning whether they are legal. Rationales for the use of secure care are not always documented, and there are instances



where mokopuna who are victims of assaults are also being admitted into secure care along with the mokopuna who assaulted them.

- Some kaimahi are unsure how to run secure care and what is expected of them. Particularly around hui whakapiri¹ and transitioning mokopuna safely back to their open unit within the residence.
- There are discrepancies in data recording in the residence and a general lack of detail included in mokopuna care plans.
 - Use of Force events have not been thoroughly reviewed and there is a distinct lack of detail recorded for all incidents in the residence where force was used on mokopuna between January and April 2025.
 - There is confusion amongst residence kaimahi regarding the threshold for making a Report of Concern (RoC) when a serious event or incident has taken place, and confusion amongst kaimahi about who can log this RoC with the Oranga Tamariki National Contact Centre.
 - No mokopuna had transition plans for their life post-residence, and the majority of residential care plans for mokopuna were left blank.
- While there were some examples of good practice, Mana Mokopuna also observed kaimahi using threatening statements towards mokopuna during our monitoring visit. We also reviewed a grievance logged by a tamaiti that was found to be justified by the Grievance Panel², and accepted by Oranga Tamariki, that detailed emotional abuse. Whilst we were on visit, there was a complaint made by te tamaiti that a kaimahi had allegedly hit them on the back of the head. (CCTV footage showed an apparent tap on the head, which is unacceptable).
 - There are also high instances of mokopuna-on-mokopuna assaults within the residence, and the inability of some kaimahi to manage unit dynamics is contributing to this.
- Kaimahi need compulsory training days to ensure their ongoing professional development and training.
 - Currently kaimahi attend training on their rostered day off, but attendance is not compulsory.
- Supervision for kaimahi is not consistently occurring.
 - Many kaimahi said they had not had supervision recently (at the time of our OPCAT Monitoring visit) and some new kaimahi were not aware of what supervision was.
 - Kaimahi who provide supervision to other colleagues were told they did not qualify to receive supervisor training. Kaimahi said that any supervision they

¹ Restorative hui to unpack what was occurring for mokopuna in the lead up to the secure care admission and the steps they need to take to repair relationships.

² The Grievance Panel review complaints made through the residence grievance system Whaia te Maramatanga. Panels are selected from the community and are independent of Oranga Tamariki.



provide is based on their own experiences of receiving supervision rather than a nationally led supervision framework. Due to this, kaimahi experiences of supervision varies significantly.

- Staffing ratios should reflect the needs of mokopuna. Kaimahi said that the staffing numbers at the time of the visit were adequate for the one functioning unit. However, this same staffing number would be expected to run a second open unit and secure care when the refurbishment was complete.
- At the time of the OPCAT Monitoring visit, mokopuna living in Whakatakapokai did not have access to offsite activity.

Areas of opportunity:

- Whakatakapokai is revitalising the residence operating model which was founded on a Māori-centred approach to delivering youth justice services. A small, bespoke, te ao Māori-based residence like Whakatakapokai has the potential to benchmark how youth justice residences can be run across the country.
 - Positively, effort was being made to strengthen the relationship with mana whenua and increase the amount of cultural programming on offer for mokopuna Māori within the residence.
 - Many kaimahi are hopeful for what the future of Whakatakapokai holds, saying they have felt a positive change in the residence culture.
- Education continues to be a highlight for mokopuna living in Whakatakapokai, as Kingslea School provides a holistic educational programme where mokopuna are engaged in their learning and can engage in education in ways that match their needs.
 - Mokopuna were earning NCEA credits during their time at Whakatakapokai, with some saying they were motivated to continue their education once back in the community. This is hugely positive.
- In terms of the material conditions of Whakatakapokai, the residence was clean and tidy and was undergoing a significant refurbishment.



Recommendations

2025 Systemic and Oranga Tamariki National Office Recommendations

As a result of the findings of our OPCAT monitoring visit in May 2025, Mana Mokopuna makes the following recommendations:

	Recommendation
1	Ensure social workers provide complete and detailed All About Me plans and comprehensive transition plans for all mokopuna in residences.
2	Ensure all kaimahi responsible for providing supervision have access to the national training programme to enable consistent practice.
3	Review staffing ratios for Whakatakapokai so that all three units can be safely managed and kaimahi can support individual mokopuna in the residence, who often have high and complex needs.
4	Incorporate all training days into the working roster to ensure kaimahi attendance on a compulsory basis, so that training across staff in residences is consistent in quality and frequency.
5	Review the Te Waharoa induction training package to ensure it is fit-for-purpose and adequately prepares kaimahi for working with mokopuna.

2025 Facility Recommendations to the Whakatakapokai Residence Manager

	Recommendation
1	Address practice issues around the use of secure care. Ensure kaimahi clearly document with relevant details the rationale for the admission, time spent in secure care, and the rationale for using Regulation 48. ³
2	Ensure kaimahi are clear on the Whakamana Tangata ⁴ framework and how this applies to their everyday practice. This includes how to competently facilitate kōrero and hui whakapiri both in the units and as part of reflection work for mokopuna when they are coming out of secure care.

³ [Oranga Tamariki \(Residential Care\) Regulations 1996 \(SR 1996/354\) \(as at 01 July 2023\) – New Zealand Legislation](#)

⁴ The restorative practice framework used in all youth justice residences.



	Recommendation
3	Urgently complete all use of force reviews that are outstanding (incomplete) with clear detail regarding the incident, a review of CCTV, and any recommendations for kaimahi training.
4	Review the Whakatakopokai process for incident reporting, including establishing a consistent threshold for completing serious event notifications and reports of concern. Ensure that all kaimahi have a clear understanding of these thresholds and the associated processes, and support these to be undertaken appropriately by kaimahi.
5	Ensure all kaimahi working with mokopuna attend supervision sessions with suitably qualified supervisors, on a regular basis, to support their practice working with mokopuna.
6	Provide regular and on-going training for all kaimahi focusing on supporting mokopuna with high and complex needs. This includes, but is not limited to, training in supporting mokopuna with neurodiversity and spectrum disorders, and approaches to effectively and safely managing complex behaviour dynamics.
7	Ensure mokopuna Māori have access to cultural programmes that support their growth and grounding in cultural identity and ensure that the residence is appropriately staffed and/or has the appropriate external support to facilitate cultural programmes.
8	Review the risk matrix for off-site activity and provide a timeline for when off-site activities and programmes will be available on a regular basis for mokopuna who are residing in Whakatakopokai.
9	Employ a Programme Coordinator in the residence to ensure there is variety and consistency in vocational and interest-based age and needs-appropriate programmes for all mokopuna to participate in.



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 Observations⁵ for New Zealand's sixth periodic review on its implementation of the Children's Convention⁶ 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 Observations⁷ for New Zealand's seventh periodic review regarding the implementation of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment⁸.

Both of these sets of observations included recommendations to New Zealand relating to upholding the rights of mokopuna Māori.

Many of the recommendations from both sets of Concluding Observations are directly relevant to aspects of treatment experienced by mokopuna at Whakatakapokai which Mana Mokopuna observed during this monitoring visit in May 2025. There continues to be significant work required by agencies (State and non-State organisations) that are responsible for detaining and depriving children and young people of their liberty, to ensure that their practice and work in this context is, in all respects, consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the recommendations of both the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the UN Committee Against Torture.

⁵ Refer CRC/C/NZL/CO/6 [G2302344 \(3\).pdf](#)

⁶ [Convention on the Rights of the Child | OHCHR](#)

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

⁸ [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment | OHCHR](#)



Report findings by domain

Treatment

This domain focuses on any allegations of torture or ill-treatment, use of seclusion, use of restraint and use of force. We also examine models of therapeutic care provided to mokopuna to understand their experience.

Whakatakapokai is revitalising its operating model

Whakatakapokai was founded on a Māori-centred approach to delivering youth justice services.⁹ The operating model includes tikanga and kaupapa that reflect a te ao Māori way of being, including mihi whakatau (welcome ceremonies), poroporoaki (leaving ceremonies), and a greater level of whānau and community involvement in how the residence is run. Mana whenua were involved in the initial planning phase of Whakatakapokai, and positively, work is being done now to strengthen that relationship again, to ensure the continued involvement of mana whenua. Whakatakapokai is revitalising its operating model with a dedicated Oranga Tamariki project team, which had recently started its work at the time of this May 2025 visit.

The original intentions of the Whakatakapokai operating model were transformational in terms of providing a well-supported therapeutic, trauma-informed environment for mokopuna with complex needs such as neurodiversity and congenital conditions.¹⁰ The intention now is to bring this model to fruition as well as well as brainstorm ideas on how it can continue to be improved. This includes strengthening the relationship with mana whenua, implementing recommendations from external monitoring teams, like Mana Mokopuna, and aligning practice and operations to the Oranga Tamariki national strategy.¹¹

Implementing an operating model that reflects an evolution of the intentions of the original operating model will help provide a solid foundation for how the residence should be run to better meet the specific rights and needs of mokopuna and will be essential for giving kaimahi (staff) a clear direction to work towards. Many kaimahi both during this visit and in past visits to Whakatakapokai have expressed the need for the purpose of Whakatakapokai to be clear – in their words, asking if the residence is specifically for mokopuna who need additional support due to complex needs, or whether they are just like any other youth justice residence. A comprehensive operating model will help to provide the clarity needed to promote the best possible outcomes for mokopuna, as everyone will have a shared understanding of the goals and vision for mokopuna care at Whakatakapokai. A small, bespoke, te ao Māori-based

⁹ [Whakatakapokai | Oranga Tamariki — Ministry for Children](#)

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ [Oranga Tamariki Strategic Intentions 2024/25 - 2029/30](#)



residence like Whakatakapokai has the potential to benchmark how youth justice residences can run across the country.

Mana Mokopuna would like to see this possibility realised by moving the residence from a state of te pō (unrealised potential) to te ao Mārama (where the full potential of the residence and, therefore, the mokopuna who live within it, comes to fruition). We look forward to seeing how the revitalised operating model mahi is implemented at our next monitoring visit.

E Tipu, E Rea is a new incentive programme aimed at promoting positive behaviour

The new Behaviour Management System (BMS), 'E Tipu, E Rea' at Whakatakapokai is based on a whakatāuki by Tā Apirana Ngata that uses the metaphor of a seed to represent mokopuna growth and development journey. The system uses a sticker chart where each day mokopuna will either earn a kākano (seed) sticker for good behaviour, or they won't earn a seed sticker if any kawa (rules) are broken. At the end of the week, they will earn a sapling sticker if they have earned enough seed stickers. Mokopuna can eventually use these sapling stickers to earn a mature rākau (tree) sticker which can be traded in for incentives. Mokopuna fed into the kinds of incentives that are on offer as part of E Tipu, E Rea, however, kaimahi acknowledged they couldn't get every incentive that mokopuna asked for. The incentives will include:

- daily awards such as snacks and comics
- weekly awards such as duvet sets, cologne, rugs, decorative cushions, hygiene items and a \$30 JD sports voucher
- cumulative awards such as massage guns, epilator, Bluetooth MP3 players, electric toothbrushes, headphones, boxing gloves and bag, a weighted blanket, and a \$80 JD sports voucher.

The new programme uses positive reinforcement and is designed to promote less variability amongst its application, to prevent it from being used as a punishment by kaimahi. Instead of taking points away that mokopuna have earned already (as it done with most residence BMS') mokopuna will keep the seed stickers they have already earned but may not earn a seed sticker for the day if they have not displayed appropriate behaviour. Using a strengths-based approach and keeping the focus on what is expected from mokopuna is shown to be the most effective in creating behaviour and attitude change for mokopuna.¹² Mana Mokopuna looks forward to seeing E Tipu, E Rea operationalised into practice as a te ao Māori-based alternative to the current BMS.

¹² [What's a Strength-Based Approach in Social Work?](#)



Overall, there were positive relationships between mokopuna and kaimahi, however there was still some concerning kaimahi practice

We observed some pockets of good practice and some positive relationships between mokopuna and kaimahi during this OPCAT Monitoring visit. However, there is still a lot of work to be done to ensure a consistent approach to positive mokopuna care in the residence. The positive interactions observed included handshakes, friendly banter, catering to mokopuna needs by making them cups of tea, and setting firm but healthy boundaries when addressing mokopuna negative behaviours. Overall, we saw good use of line of sight and some pertinent practice reminders during shift handovers, like keeping within arm's length when mokopuna had 1:1 kaimahi assigned to them.

However, some kaimahi were observed making threatening statements towards mokopuna such as "if you don't behave you will be sent to Korowai Manaaki¹³" and explaining in relation to this that "you [mokopuna] don't want that." Kaimahi used a staunch tone when setting expectations, which came across as overly authoritarian and cold, with mokopuna listening with heads down, seemingly avoiding eye contact.

By undertaking a review of recent grievances¹⁴ as part of our monitoring, Mana Mokopuna saw that a complaint regarding kaimahi emotional abuse of a tamaiti within the residence had been upheld.

Separately, we were made aware that a tamaiti had logged a complaint regarding kaimahi allegedly hitting them on the back of the head during our onsite visit time. CCTV footage had been reviewed by the residence leadership team and found to be an apparent tap on the head, which is unacceptable. The tamaiti was adamant it had been a hit on his head, and he was offered the option to log a grievance.

We also witnessed kaimahi being complicit when mokopuna described another tamaiti as 'handicapped'. This tamaiti had been separated from the group in an interview room due to their hyperactivity, and kaimahi were nonchalant about him being in this room alone. More generally, many kaimahi commented on the high use of secure care to manage mokopuna behaviour within the residence. Kaimahi said secure care is managed differently now to how it was in the past in the residence, when it was rarely used at all.

It is imperative that kaimahi continue to build positive, healthy relationships with mokopuna to help coach and mentor them during their time in the residence. Kaimahi have the opportunity to create a warm and open environment where mokopuna feel confident to communicate and form strong bonds with pro-social adults. This can be a positive contributor

¹³ Korowai Manaaki is the largest youth justice residence in Aotearoa and situated a short drive away from Whakatakapokai.

¹⁴ Whaia te Maramatanga is the grievance or complaint system used by all Oranga Tamariki run residences. These complaints are managed internally by the residence and can be escalated by mokopuna to an independent panel for decision review.



to their rehabilitation and to their pathway once they leave the residence and return to the community. When issues do occur within the residence, conflict should be resolved in a restorative way to help promote effective resolution for and amongst mokopuna.

Mokopuna are entitled to a high standard of care in youth justice residences, in the care of the State.¹⁵ The relationship between staff and mokopuna should always be professional and be focused on the well-being, culture, and needs of mokopuna residing in the facility.¹⁶ Due to inappropriate kaimahi practice, Whakatakopokai is not always providing mokopuna with the level of care needed to meet their individual needs.

There has been an increase in secure care admissions

By way of background, the isolation and seclusion of mokopuna goes against their human rights. The Committee Against Torture, the Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture and the Committee on the Rights of the Child note that the use of solitary confinement, of any duration on children, constitutes cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment or even torture.¹⁷ There is strong international advocacy for the seclusion of all mokopuna in all settings to cease immediately. The Concluding Observations released by the United Nations Committee Against Torture on 26 July 2023 recommend New Zealand should immediately end the practice of solitary confinement for children in detention.¹⁸ Mana Mokopuna supports zero seclusion practices.

Secure care admissions at Whakatakopokai have increased in recent months prior to the OPCAT Monitoring visit.¹⁹ Many kaimahi raised the use of secure care and the rationale as to why secure care was needed at all, and said that on some occasions, mokopuna did not meet the legal threshold²⁰ for admission.

Secure care data reviewed on-site by Mana Mokopuna shows examples of very vague explanations for why secure care was deemed necessary, such as for “threatening behaviour” or it being used to simply address “unit dynamics”. The use of regulation 48²¹, which confines mokopuna to their bedrooms whilst in the secure care area for large portions of the day, was also being used regularly in the residence, with grounds for its use not always clearly stated, or for reasons such as “unmanageable behaviour” or “becoming aggressive.” The amount of

¹⁵[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](#)

¹⁶[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](#)

¹⁷ A/ HRC/28/68, para 44

¹⁸ / HRC/28/68, para 44

¹⁹ Data supplied by Oranga Tamariki

²⁰ S368 of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 sets out the grounds for a secure care admission.

²¹ [Oranga Tamariki \(Residential Care\) Regulations 1996 \(SR 1996/354\) \(as at 01 July 2023\) 48 Confinement to rooms of children and young persons in secure care – New Zealand Legislation](#)



time that mokopuna spent in their rooms during the day was also not always clearly documented.

The grounds as per section 368 of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 for the use of secure care are clear – secure care can only be used to prevent mokopuna from absconding or to prevent mokopuna from causing physical harm to themselves or others. Threatening behaviour and addressing unit dynamics are not valid reasons for utilising the most restrictive practice available in a youth justice residence.

In addition to this, mokopuna who were victims of assaults were also sent to secure care, and there was one example of a tamaiti, who was a victim of an assault by other mokopuna while in the residence, spending a longer time in secure care than the two mokopuna who assaulted them. There were also examples of mokopuna remaining in secure care due to illness, or due to being unable to complete their reflection work. These reasons do not align with the intent of the legislation and can therefore be considered instances of the use of secure care that do not meet the requirements of the applicable law.

During past OPCAT Monitoring visits to Whakatakapokai, specifically in 2022, this residence was commended for using secure as a last resort, resulting in very few admissions. However, during this May 2025 visit, many kaimahi commented that they thought the tolerance in the residence for secure care admissions had been lowered, resulting in the increased use of secure care.²² Using secure care as a last resort was something that in previous years, kaimahi took pride in at Whakatakapokai, as well as being part of the philosophy Whakatakapokai was founded on – unique service delivery that is trauma-informed, grounded in te ao Māori and holds the mana of mokopuna and their whānau in the highest regard, while meeting their specific needs in relation to their neurodiversity or other conditions.²³ Some of these principles seem to have been lost in recent times, and as one kaimahi told us during this monitoring visit, “we are in danger of becoming just another youth justice residence.”

In instances where secure care is used, it is crucial that it is only used as a last resort. In order to meet the requirements of Oranga Tamariki legislation, when secure care is used, adequate evidence and rationale must be documented as to why its use was deemed necessary. Secure care is harmful to mokopuna and Mana Mokopuna would like to see the facility decrease its use and move towards zero seclusion practices.

The Concluding Observations released by the United Nations Committee Against Torture on 26 July 2023 recommends New Zealand should immediately end the practice of solitary confinement for children in detention.²⁴

²² Data analysed suggests an upward trend in the use of secure care at Whakatakapokai since our March 2022 OPCAT Monitoring visit.

²³ [Whakatakapokai | Oranga Tamariki — Ministry for Children](#)

²⁴ A/ HRC/28/68, para 44



Mokopuna relationships with each other within the residence can be problematic

Some mokopuna were observed having positive interactions with one another in the residence during our monitoring visit. However, we observed that there was also a culture of bullying present at the residence. Mokopuna who had higher needs in particular were targeted by other mokopuna and were often separated from the rest of the group. These particular mokopuna were often targeted during assaults as they were not always aware of social boundaries and expectations. There were situations where mokopuna being bullied wanted to spend time in secure care, away from the rest of the group, as this was where they felt the safest. The MySafety documentation reviewed by Mana Mokopuna showed that between December 2024 and April 2025 there were at least ten recorded assaults on mokopuna by their peers within Whakatakakopai. This number is quite significant given there were only 8-10 mokopuna on site during this time.

All mokopuna have the right to be and feel safe where they live. As at the time of our monitoring visit, this is unfortunately not a reality for some mokopuna at Whakatakakopai, and this reality is exacerbated for mokopuna with neurodiversity diagnoses and high and complex needs. It is imperative that kaimahi are vigilant with line of sight and ensure that they role-model positive interactions for mokopuna, as well as actively addressing negative comments made by mokopuna about other mokopuna. This can be done by providing education to mokopuna on what appropriate behaviour looks and sounds like, as well as through the implementation of E Tipu, E Rea, to help all mokopuna feel safe and supported during their time at Whakatakakopai.

Mokopuna All About Me Plans were often left blank

All mokopuna who enter Whakatakakopai should be admitted to the facility with an All About Me Plan (AAMP) covering the care arrangements and specific needs of individual mokopuna filled in by their Oranga Tamariki site social worker. Whakatakakopai has created its own residential care plans to be used in conjunction with AAMPs. However, the majority of the residential care plans sent to Mana Mokopuna as part of our monitoring visit were also largely blank. Of the mokopuna that did have an AAMP, these were filled out and completed at another residence. Kaimahi said mokopuna AAMPs are often incomplete when mokopuna arrive, and some contained incorrect information such as the wrong mokopuna name, which can make it challenging to find the information they need to provide the best care possible for mokopuna and to meet their specific needs. It is essential for mokopuna plans to be completed, with input from mokopuna and their whānau, and to be updated regularly by their social worker. The requirement for mokopuna to have a clear care plan to meet their rights and needs, and for mokopuna to have input into their plan, was not being realised for all mokopuna at Whakatakakopai.



"I have had maybe three times been provided a full handover for a young person with all their information and needs included to provide responsive care – details around their needs, legal guardians, flags around suicide risk, safety considerations, allergies, and phobias."
(Kaimahi)

Mokopuna are required to have input into their plans. Essential details such as the services provided to them, personal objectives, whānau contact details, and information regarding their education, recreation, and welfare needs are also required under section 3(3) of the Oranga Tamariki (Residential Care) Regulations 1996²⁵. Practice at Whakatakapokai was not always consistent with these requirements.

No mokopuna in the residence at the time of the monitoring visit had transition plans

None of the mokopuna living in Whakatakapokai at the time of the May 2025 visit had transition plans. This is very concerning, as transition plans are pivotal in helping mokopuna return to whānau and their own communities. Kaimahi also highlighted the difficulty in identifying and engaging community-based supports for mokopuna who are placed outside of their home region. Kaimahi said this has been a contributing factor in some mokopuna returning to residential custody shortly after release from Whakatakapokai. One kaimahi said the shortest time they have seen mokopuna return within (following their release from Whakatakapokai) was three days.

The residence needs to provide greater opportunities for whānau (family) connection and community-based involvement, which research has shown is among the most effective steps that can be taken to reduce reoffending rates.²⁶ Social workers and the residence kaimahi need to work together to develop mokopuna transition plans for individual mokopuna shortly after entering the residence, so that mokopuna can be well-supported to return home and reintegrate into the community, and decrease their risk of re-offending once they are back in the community.

"It's good to have those relationships where there are people who understand them [mokopuna] within the residence setting and then can engage and support them beyond the residence, that continuity of care makes a difference."

(Kaimahi)

²⁵ [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](#)

²⁶ For example, see: [Risk and Protective Factors and Interventions for Reducing Juvenile Delinquency: A Systematic Review](#)



Oranga Tamariki social workers are required to provide appropriate transition supports and ensure a positive care transition experience for mokopuna under section 74 of the Oranga Tamariki (National Care Standards and Related Matters) Regulations 2018²⁷. This includes providing information on their placements prior to their transition date and providing sufficient monitoring and support during their care transition.

²⁷ [Oranga Tamariki \(National Care Standards and Related Matters\) Regulations 2018 \(LI 2018/111\) \(as at 01 May 2023\) 74 Monitoring and support during care transition phase – New Zealand Legislation](#)



Protection Systems

This domain examines how well-informed mokopuna are upon entering a facility. We also assess measures that protect and uphold the rights and dignity of mokopuna, including complaints procedures and recording systems.

Admissions can be a stressful time for mokopuna

Whakatakopokai is subject to a range of court conditions under the Resource Management Act,²⁸ that require annual reporting to demonstrate that the residence is compliant with the requirements.²⁹ The Environment Court conditions that were stipulated when the residence was designated as a Youth Justice facility, are pivotal in the development of operational procedures, policies, and admission process for mokopuna.

One Environment Court condition influences how referrals for admission to Whakatakopokai are managed. The condition requires a clinical assessment³⁰ that is reviewed by a psychologist and the Residence Manager to ensure compliance. An experienced and qualified psychologist is necessary to verify the assessment against four court mandated screening criteria. These criteria assess the level of risk and need for individual tamaiti, to determine if Whakatakopokai is the most appropriate placement for them. The four, court mandated criteria are interdependent, meaning that if a referral does not meet one criteria it is declined.

Kaimahi spoke to the referral process not being mokopuna-centred, as there are often delays in the right information and assessments occurring to allow admission. This means that mokopuna are often required to be admitted into other youth justice residences before they can be referred to Whakatakopokai by their social worker, resulting in unnecessary disruption to their routines and negative experiences. During the monitoring visit, Mana Mokopuna was informed about an example of a tamaiti who was taken to Whakatakopokai and had to wait at the gate for an hour and a half with nowhere to use the bathroom, as their Oranga Tamariki site social worker did not have the appropriate court order paperwork needed for their admission. It is important that all agencies involved in mokopuna care including Police, social workers, and Whakatakopokai kaimahi, communicate effectively to ensure all the relevant information is available prior to bringing mokopuna to the facility, to prevent stressful admission experiences for mokopuna, and to ensure the rights and specific needs of mokopuna are kept central and upheld.

There are inconsistencies in residence documentation

Up-to-date and accurate documentation is critical for accountability and keeping mokopuna safe. Mana Mokopuna reviewed a variety of key documentation sets as part of this May 2025

²⁸ [3800 Care and Protection Centre - Upper North Whakatakopokai Conditions \(aucklandcouncil.govt.nz\)](https://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz)

²⁹ [Whakatakopokai | Oranga Tamariki — Ministry for Children](https://www.mca.govt.nz)

³⁰ [3800 Care and Protection Centre - Upper North Whakatakopokai Conditions \(aucklandcouncil.govt.nz\)](https://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz) refer to pg. 26.



visit. These included Use of Force reviews, incident reporting and reports of concern. When asked about key accountability documentation, a variety of kaimahi from different areas of operations across the residence said that this documentation was often not up-to-standard.

There was also a distinct lack of clarity from kaimahi in the residence regarding when different forms or notifications should be used. Mana Mokopuna found instances of Serious Event Notification forms being completed for a mokopuna-on-mokopuna assault, but no Report of Concern that followed this, whereas other similar incidents had both a Serious Event Notification and a Report of Concern.

Of significant concern, the process for who can log Reports of Concern to the National Contact Centre was unclear within the residence, with multiple kaimahi indicating the residence manager was the triage point. The protection mechanism for mokopuna is impacted when one person is deciding whether the harm threshold has been reached for formal notification – it limits the opportunity to engage in robust discussion and transparent accountability. There was concern expressed by several kaimahi that there is a desire to “control the [external] narrative for the residence.” Consequently, there is a fear from some kaimahi that events and standard notifications are going un-reported. Some kaimahi specifically described to Mana Mokopuna a “closing window of transparency” and they expressed worries that this will have detrimental impacts on mokopuna care in the residence.

Use of Force is not being appropriately reviewed

Mana Mokopuna is concerned that Use of Force reviews are not happening in a timely manner in the residence. Through documentation reviewed by Mana Mokopuna, we observed that most Use of Force events were not thoroughly detailed or appropriately reviewed between the dates of January and April 2025. The review templates for each incident detailed the kaimahi and mokopuna involved and what STAR³¹ hold was used. However, there was no commentary as to whether the incident details were consistent with CCTV footage, if the holds were aligned to training, and whether any further action in terms of (re)training was required for kaimahi. The documentation from the same period in 2024 contained these essential details, which further highlighted the lack of details apparent in the 2025 sample.

When force is being used on mokopuna it is imperative that events are highly detailed, and that all mitigation strategies are used to limit the use of force, given that use of force should only be permitted as an absolute last resort. If details of events are not available, kaimahi cannot learn from past events to prevent this harm from happening again. There is also concern that if there is a delay in completing the use of force reviews, kaimahi may not be provided with essential STAR refresher training when needed. There is a high chance of mokopuna being harmed in all situations where force is used, and Mana Mokopuna

³¹ Safe Tactical Approach Response is the model used in all youth justice residences when kaimahi use force on mokopuna.



recommends the backlog of reviews are urgently completed and a clear system is put in place to ensure reviews are carried out as soon as practicable after the event occurs. This recommendation for urgent action was put to Oranga Tamariki following this monitoring visit.

Independent Advocates come into the residence regularly

VOYCE Whakarongo Mai (VOYCE) and the Grievance Panel had been coming into Whakatakapokai regularly prior to our monitoring visit, and there was a visit from VOYCE during the time of the visit. VOYCE came in to run a programme for mokopuna and talked to them about their rights. They appeared to have a good relationship with mokopuna, and most mokopuna knew who they were.

The Grievance Panel has only had one member for the past year but said they still try to come to the residence once a fortnight. There were two new panel members starting soon, including a mana whenua representative. Mana Mokopuna noted there was a mailbox outside the education block for letters and grievances to be posted by mokopuna. Kaimahi admitted it has not been used regularly by mokopuna, however, it does provide a more discreet way for them to submit a grievance if they choose.

It is essential that mokopuna maintain regular contact with advocates and build a positive relationship with them, so they can help promote mokopuna wellbeing and safety by providing support when needed, based on trusted relationships and mokopuna having a clear understanding of the role of advocates.

Mokopuna have a right to access an independent complaints system and have help from advocates to formulate feedback regarding their experiences in care.³² It was a positive to see mokopuna being visited regularly by their advocates while at Whakatakapokai.

Social worker and lawyer practice is inconsistent for mokopuna in Whakatakapokai

Some social workers and lawyers were making contact with mokopuna in Whakatakapokai regularly. However, other mokopuna said they had not heard from their social worker or lawyer in a while. For example, two mokopuna had the same social worker, and one of the tamaiti said they had regular visits, whilst the other one said they hardly saw their social worker despite living in the same residence as the other mokopuna. Mana Mokopuna was also told of occasions where social workers failed to report to court when required.

Mana Mokopuna acknowledges that some social workers have high caseloads. However, they still have a duty of care for mokopuna and should be there for key dates relating to the resolution of youth justice matters, which can have a significant bearing on the lives of

³² [United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty | OHCHR](#) Articles 75-78



mokopuna and their whānau. It is essential that social workers and lawyers maintain regular contact with mokopuna to keep them informed and up-to-date on their plan, as this will help promote a smooth transition back into the community. Residence kaimahi can assist with this by communicating well with social workers to make sure they have ample notice to plan for required hui (meetings) with mokopuna and others.

As part of Oranga Tamariki practice standards, social workers are required to see mokopuna regularly, face-to-face and ideally alone, in order to build trust, understand their needs, and ensure they have a say in decisions that impact them.³³ This requirement was not being realised for all mokopuna at Whakatakapokai.

³³ [See and engage tamariki | Practice Centre | Oranga Tamariki](#)



Personnel

This domain focuses on the relationships between staff and mokopuna, and the recruitment, training, support and supervision offered to the staff team. In order for facilities to provide therapeutic care and a safe environment for mokopuna, staff must be highly skilled, trained and supported.

The leadership team was not yet working as a cohesive unit

There had been changes in the senior leadership team for the residence within a relatively short period of time since our last February 2024 visit. At the time of this visit, a new residence manager had been in place for just over six months and there was an acting Manager Residence Operations. All kaimahi Mana Mokopuna spoke with expressed the sentiment of the residence being in a state of transition, from the 'old' management to the 'new'.

Several kaimahi were eager to progress and embed changes the new manager had already implemented and expressed a readiness to fully get behind the new leadership team to carve out a new path for the residence. However, other kaimahi expressed feeling on the outside of decision making and felt communications were lacking generally across the leadership group. Some said they are not part of key leadership hui and feel excluded. Some kaimahi said they weren't sure if they could give honest feedback to their leaders as there was a lack of trust in how that feedback would be received.

In order for the residence to move as a cohesive unit, there is a need for those in leadership roles to come together and develop a shared approach, drawing on each other's strengths and collectively and strategically work to move the residence forward. It is essential that the leadership team role models positive workplace interactions, in order to provide a solid foundation to allow this practice to be embedded throughout the facility.

Many kaimahi were hopeful for what the future holds

Despite the challenges at the leadership level, many kaimahi working with mokopuna in Whakatakakopai said they felt a positive change in the residence culture at the time of our monitoring visit. Kaimahi have enjoyed seeing leaders in the units, and most kaimahi said they leave work at the end of their shift feeling happy, as they know what is expected of them.

Kaimahi spoke of a team lunch put on by the operating model project team, which helped promote a whānau-like atmosphere that made them feel valued. Kaimahi said people are showing up to work regularly, which was previously highlighted as an issue. Kaimahi were observed maintaining good line of sight, positioning themselves appropriately in the units, doing group 'mauri checks' every hour so they knew what was happening in the units, and information was being shared appropriately across the various shift teams.



It is essential the residence promotes a positive workplace culture on an ongoing basis, to ensure kaimahi are supported to provide best practice and care for mokopuna, which will have the most positive impact on their future beyond the youth justice residence.

"Kaimahi need to be valued and supported... that is everything when it comes to looking after our kids... you need to look after the kaimahi and give them what they need to be able to do the job itself... and that's starting to happen."

(Kaimahi)

Consideration should be given to increasing the number of kaimahi on shifts

At the time of our May 2025 monitoring visit, one open unit at Whakatakāpokai was being fully re-furnished and was closed, meaning all nine mokopuna were housed in a single 10-bed unit. During this time, the same amount of kaimahi usually rostered for the two units was rostered to the single unit, given the total number of mokopuna on site. Although staffing ratios were adequate at the time of the visit given the area needing to be managed, kaimahi said that there was often not enough kaimahi to properly run the two units.

Given Whakatakāpokai is a youth justice residence for mokopuna with high and complex needs, kaimahi expressed that staffing numbers still limited the work they could safely do with mokopuna in the residence. This includes utilising separate areas and rooms in the unit for 1:1 work, daily programmes, or routines. If a limited number of kaimahi are split into several spaces, this can limit line of sight and compromise everyone's safety.

Kaimahi also raised the issue that the residence does not have dedicated kaimahi to run the secure care unit when it is in use. This means that when mokopuna are admitted into secure care, kaimahi from the open units must be used to look after those mokopuna, thus reducing the kaimahi ratio in the open units. This is unlike any other residence in the country, as they all have a dedicated team rostered for the secure care unit. Essentially, kaimahi said that they have enough numbers on shift now for one unit, but when they go back to managing three separate units, there is not enough kaimahi to always manage mokopuna dynamics.

Mana Mokopuna recommends a thorough review of the staffing ratios for the residence. If Whakatakāpokai is going to embed a truly therapeutic and trauma-informed operating model, more kaimahi are required to ensure tailored care plans and behaviour responses can be carried out. Consideration should also be given to ensure safe kaimahi numbers are available for all units when they are open.

Kaimahi endorse the current roster system

Kaimahi said they do 12-hour shifts with four days on and then four days off. Many kaimahi said the current roster works well for their teams, as it allows them to have a good work/life balance so they can be home in time for dinner with their whānau or they start late enough



drop their own tamariki off at school. Many kaimahi said this kind of roster has kept them in their job longer, as a large number of kaimahi had been at Whakatakapokai since the facility opened four years ago. A new roster is being piloted in another Oranga Tamariki youth justice residence, and it is important that Oranga Tamariki National Office continues to get kaimahi feedback on the new system to promote increased retention and with it, more consistent care for mokopuna.

Kaimahi need compulsory training days

Currently kaimahi attend 'office day' or 'training day' on their day off. Although most kaimahi were making the effort to attend training, their training days need to be embedded into the roster in order to ensure consistent attendance and sustainability. On-going training was identified as a priority by the Residence Manager. Training had recently been provided on the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), Whakamana Tangata,³⁴ and policies and procedures around the use of secure care. The Residence Manager said kaimahi have only been doing training once every two months, and advocates for these days to be part of the working week.

On-going, regular and compulsory training and professional development for residence kaimahi is essential to upskill and build kaimahi capability and subsequently improve outcomes for mokopuna. Mokopuna at Whakatakapokai are often admitted with complex needs and specific neurodiversities and health conditions, and therefore training in neurodiversity, managing complex dynamics and meeting the needs of mokopuna in these contexts is essential.

"the training is everything... we're a young residence and that's why the training is important... it's not just tick boxes... we need it... and functioning the way things should be... in a safe way... safety for those providing care and those being cared for..."

(Kaimahi)

Supervision for kaimahi needs to be a priority

Many kaimahi said they had not had supervision recently at the time of the monitoring visit, and some new kaimahi were not aware what supervision was or the value it adds to practice.

Kaimahi who provide supervision were told they did not qualify to receive supervisor training by Oranga Tamariki National Office, which means when supervision is provided, it is based on kaimahi personal experiences of supervision, as opposed to a national standard. It is essential all kaimahi working with mokopuna receive regular, on-going, high-quality supervision, in order to improve their practice and support their wellbeing. This will help ensure the best possible outcome for mokopuna in their care. In order to do this, kaimahi tasked with providing supervision need to be provided with adequate training by Oranga Tamariki

³⁴ [Evaluation-of-Whakapapakokai-Youth-Justice-Residence.pdf](#)



National Office. Supervision also needs to be prioritised to ensure kaimahi have adequate time away from the units to attend.

Professional supervision is a requirement for all Oranga Tamariki staff who work directly with mokopuna.³⁵ Mana Mokopuna would like to see all residence kaimahi who work directly with mokopuna attending high quality supervision on a regular, ongoing basis to promote best practice. It is essential that kaimahi who are tasked with providing supervision are provided with adequate training to ensure a high standard of oversight, and to support consistency of supervision nationally across youth justice residences.

³⁵ [Professional supervision | Practice Centre | Oranga Tamariki](#)



Improving outcomes for mokopuna Māori

This domain focuses on identity and belonging, which are fundamental for all mokopuna to thrive. We note commitment to mātauranga Māori and the extent to which Māori values are upheld, cultural capacity is expanded and mokopuna are supported to explore their whakapapa.

Amongst kaimahi at Whakatakapokai, there was a desire to do more for mokopuna Māori

Mokopuna Māori continue to be over-represented in places of detention,³⁶ including Whakatakapokai. The 2023-issued Concluding Observations of the UN Committee Against Torture and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child outline the need for policy and legislative changes to address these disparities.³⁷ As a government department, Oranga Tamariki – and therefore its residences – should be doing everything in their power to uphold the Crown’s Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations and improve outcomes for mokopuna Māori whilst they are in the care of the State.

Although there were some aspects of kawa and tikanga upheld at Whakatakapokai and kaupapa Māori programmes occurring at the time of the OPCAT monitoring visit (such as mihi whakatau and Te Wiki o Te Reo Māori activities), residence kaimahi expressed wanting to do more te ao Māori based programming including waiata (singing), karakia (prayer/chant and intention setting), and work to connect mokopuna to their whakapapa (cultural heritage). Whakatakapokai was originally founded using a te ao Māori-based approach, however, it has been a challenge to bring this to life operationally. Mokopuna specifically expressed a desire to learn more about their whakapapa at the time of the visit. It is essential that mokopuna Māori are provided with opportunities to learn about their culture, as this helps support positive self-identity and overall hauora (health) and wellbeing. This is also consistent with their rights to culture and language under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

“[Cultural integration] it’s the only way we can save these babies”.

(Kaimahi)

The integration of te ao Māori practices and mātauranga Māori within the residence gives effect to Article 2 of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, which guarantees Māori protection of all taonga, including language and customs. There is scope for this mahi to continue to develop to meet the rights and needs of mokopuna Māori who live in Whakatakapokai.

³⁶ [Hāpaitia te Oranga Tangata | New Zealand Ministry of Justice](#)

³⁷ Refer CAT/C/NZL/CO/7/31



Effort is being made to rebuild the relationship with Mana Whenua

The operating model project team onsite at the time of this May 2025 visit was working to rebuild the relationship with mana whenua, to gather their voice and wisdom on future operations and operating models for Whakatakapokai. At the time of the visit, it was the responsibility of the Kaiwhakaue³⁸ to hold the relationship with mana whenua. However, due to their high workload, the facility was looking to hire another Kaiwhakaue to support this process. Strong, meaningful, and reciprocal connections with mana whenua, hāpu, and iwi, are essential to providing mokopuna with positive role-models, mentors, and activities that support their cultural understanding and identity. Mana Mokopuna would like to see these relationships and opportunities strengthened over the years to come and looks forward to seeing the progress made in strengthening mana whenua involvement in the facility.

The residence was making an effort to build kaimahi cultural capability

At the time of the visit, the Kaiwhakaue was providing most of the cultural programming in the residence. However, this is outside the scope of their role, and it is the responsibility of all kaimahi working in the residence to ensure kaupapa Māori programmes are available for mokopuna, and to ensure that te reo Māori is normalised across residence operations. We note that the Kaiwhakaue was going over and above their role responsibilities to provide cultural programmes such a kapa haka for the mokopuna in Whakatakapokai, however, all kaimahi should have the ability to support this initiative, regardless of whakapapa.

The majority of the kaimahi on the staff at Whakatakapokai during the time of this monitoring whakapapa Pacifica (were of Pacific heritage), and residence training leads wanted to find a way to make kaupapa Māori based programming relatable to increase kaimahi buy-in. Training was being provided on topics such as Whakamana Tangata, which is a kaupapa Māori method of restorative practice and conflict resolution. The residence trainers have reframed the navigation journey (that is used as a metaphor to guide Whakamana Tangata) to better represent those of Pacific heritage to help them connect with and see the importance of these concepts.

Under Article 1 of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, mokopuna have the right to engage in activities that connect them to their culture. Under Article 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children who are indigenous, or who belong to ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities, have the right to enjoy their own culture, religion and language. It is essential that these rights are upheld for mokopuna at Whakatakapokai.

Mokopuna Māori should have the opportunity to engage and participate in kaupapa Māori focused activities that support their self-discovery and Mana

³⁸ The Kaiwhakaue role is focussed on supporting and developing residence kaimahi within a Māori-centred framework.



Motuhake.³⁹ This is in line with having self-autonomy under Article 1 of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and is consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 2023 Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.⁴⁰

³⁹ [mana Motuhake - Te Aka Māori Dictionary \(maoridictionary.co.nz\)](https://www.maoridictionary.co.nz/mana-motuhake)

⁴⁰ [Convention on the Rights of the Child | OHCHR](https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-treaties/convention-rights-child)
[Refer CRC/C/NZL/CO/6.](https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-treaties/convention-rights-child)



Activities and access to others

This domain focuses on the opportunities available to mokopuna to engage in quality, youth-friendly activities inside and outside secure facilities, including education and vocational activities. It is concerned with how the personal development of mokopuna is supported, including contact with friends and whānau.

Mokopuna were no longer given opportunities to attend off-site activities

Offsite activities are essential for providing mokopuna with access to their community, whenua (land), and to promote engagement in a variety of pro-social activities. Mokopuna living in Whakatakakopai used to have access to regular offsite activities. However, at the time of the OPCAT monitoring visit, due to a recent incident where a tamaiti absconded, offsites had been put on pause for all mokopuna in the facility, despite this tamaiti since leaving the facility.

There was a significant breakdown in communication that led to this particular incident, as kaimahi relayed that the tamaiti had said ahead of time they planned to abscond. Kaimahi said this information was passed on to the relevant kaimahi, however, risk mitigation strategies were not updated or applied appropriately. Notably this offsite also had no access to a toilet for either mokopuna or kaimahi to use.

The Residence Manager said it would be many months before they would consider bringing offsite activities back, as kaimahi still needed training in managing risks and venues when offsite. Other kaimahi expressed that the facility is very risk-averse and that punishing mokopuna for this incident was inappropriate, as it further leads to their institutionalisation. Mokopuna raised with Mana Mokopuna that they would like to see offsites brought back for all mokopuna within Whakatakakopai, as they had not attended any since they arrived.

Mana Mokopuna would like to see offsites begin as soon as possible to ensure all mokopuna in their care can experience the benefit of being involved in the community and be engaged in positive life experiences, further contributing to mokopuna wellbeing and development towards their future. We asked the Residence Manager to act on this in real-time following our monitoring visit.

Mokopuna were engaged in onsite activities, however some activities were unavailable at the time of the visit

Mokopuna were observed engaging in a range of onsite activities including sports in the onsite gym, such as ripper rugby, basketball, and volleyball. Mokopuna had access to activities in the unit such as table tennis and low-stimulation activities such as cards, chess and movies. Mokopuna had been engaged in woodwork recently and had made some picnic tables now



situated near the mara kai (garden). Kaimahi said they had plans to work with mana whenua in setting up the mara kai to grow medicinal plants. Vegetables such as lettuce and kale had been planted in raised beds outside the education block, which was positive to see.



Fresh vegetables planted by mokopuna (left), tables made by mokopuna outside the mara kai (right).

There was a portable pool used over summer, however it was removed during the winter months. Kaimahi said the pool was a great way of helping mokopuna de-escalate from heightened behaviours, and wished they had access to a pool all year round for mokopuna to use. Mokopuna said they used to have a café skills learning programme that they would like to see brought back, as they wanted to learn how to make coffees and restaurant style food. Kaimahi said they hadn't been using the outdoor area to play sports recently, because mokopuna had been collecting rocks to use as weapons. It is essential that mokopuna are provided with a range of activities that can help them build vocational and life skills to help support them on a positive trajectory towards the future, and to support them to leave the residence back into the community equipped with more positive learning, education, skills and knowledge.

Mokopuna have the right to participate in recreational activities such as sports, music, art, and drama. More should be done at Whakatakopokai to uphold mokopuna rights under Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child⁴¹ by providing as many activity options for mokopuna to be involved in as they choose, including educational opportunities and programming, such as work readiness and life-skills programmes.

⁴¹ [Convention on the Rights of the Child | OHCHR](#) - Article 31

Education continues to be a highlight for mokopuna

Kingslea School provides a holistic education programme at Whakatakapokai where mokopuna are engaged in their learning and can experience education in ways that match their specific learning style and needs. Mokopuna were observed watching a film and answering questions at the time of the visit such as “how does this scene align with the tikanga Māori value of manaaki (care for others)?” Mokopuna provided thoughtful answers that showed they were interested in what they were doing and well engaged in their learning.

Mokopuna set goals based around Te Whare Tapa Whā⁴² that they could work towards as part of their individual learning plan. Mokopuna were evaluated based on how well they demonstrated Kingslea School values such as how much effort they put in and their attitude towards common subjects such as numeracy, literacy, and physical activity and health. Mokopuna were also earning NCEA credits during their time at Whakatakapokai and a tamaiti at the time of the visit said they wanted to continue going to school once they were back in the community. Their social worker reported that they had since been released from the residence and was attending school in the community again, which was positive to learn.

Mokopuna who come into Whakatakapokai are often disengaged from education in the community for a variety of reasons. The education programme at Whakatakapokai provides an opportunity for mokopuna to earn NCEA credits and become motivated and inspired to continue their learning journey and understand that education pathways exist for them into the future.



The classroom lounge area where mokopuna watch movies (left), posters on the wall with tikanga Māori values (right).

All mokopuna have specific rights to engage in and have access to education under Articles 28 and 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁴³ The right to education was being fully realised for mokopuna at

⁴² [Te Whare Tapa Whā | Mental Health Foundation](#)

⁴³ [Convention on the Rights of the Child | OHCHR](#) - Article 28 and 29 Education



Whakatakapokai, with mokopuna also returning to education in the community after being inspired to do so during their time at Whakatakapokai. This is a very positive outcome that the residence is supporting for the mokopuna in its care.

Mokopuna had regular contact with their whānau

Mokopuna who we spoke to said they had seen their whānau since being admitted into Whakatakapokai. Social workers also said they had observed good whānau contact since mokopuna had been in the residence. Whānau visits typically occurred 3-5pm on weekdays and 10am-2pm on weekends, although exceptions were made if whānau were traveling from afar. Mokopuna could video call their whānau in the green room (admission area) or use that space for in-person whānau visits.

Mokopuna have a right to see their whānau when detained in youth justice facilities, in line with section 10 of the Oranga Tamariki Residential Care Regulations.⁴⁴ It was a positive to see this right upheld for mokopuna at Whakatakapokai.

Mokopuna have the right to see their whānau regularly when in state care as outlined under section 10 of the Oranga Tamariki Residential Care Regulations.⁴⁵ Whakatakapokai makes every effort to ensure all mokopuna, regardless of where they come from, can exercise this right. Connection with the local community and their whānau encourages young people to feel included and part of a caring and protective environment that will love and guide them.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ [Oranga Tamariki \(Residential Care\) Regulations 1996 \(SR 1996/354\) \(as at 01 July 2023\) 10 Rights to visits and communications with family and other persons – New Zealand Legislation](#)

⁴⁵ [Oranga Tamariki \(Residential Care\) Regulations 1996 \(SR 1996/354\) \(as at 01 July 2023\) 10 Rights to visits and communications with family and other persons – New Zealand Legislation](#)

⁴⁶ <https://www.manamokopuna.org.nz/publications/media-releases/reset-of-youth-justice-system-cannot-be-delayed-chief-childrens-commissioner/>



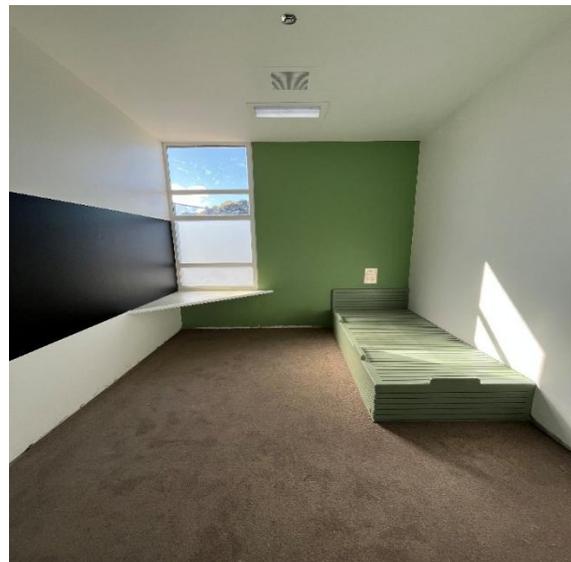
Material Conditions

This domain assesses the quality and quantity of food, access to outside spaces, hygiene facilities, clothing, bedding, lighting and ventilation available to mokopuna. It focuses on understanding how the living conditions in secure facilities contribute to the wellbeing and dignity of mokopuna.

Improvements were being made to the interior of the facility

One of the units at Whakatakapokai was being refurbished at the time of the visit. All mokopuna had been moved into the other available unit so that work could be completed one unit at a time. Mokopuna were due to move to the newly renovated area soon. The inside area where mokopuna were living was clean and tidy. There was also a dance room with a large mirror in it that mokopuna could use to learn dance.

The renovated area had lots of natural sunlight coming through the windows and overall had a warmer and brighter feel. There was new carpet that was lighter in colour than the previous version, freshly painted walls and doors, stained glass window art in the laundry and bathrooms, wood panelling for a textured look, skylights in the corridor, Perspex frosting on the windows with Māori designs of waka and stars, and there was black chalkboard paint for mokopuna to draw on in their bedrooms.



The unit refurbishment (left), new mokopuna bedrooms with black chalk paint (right).



Secure care area with designs in the window frosting (left), newly painted walls (right).

Kaimahi said they will be adding more art to the renovated area soon. Kaimahi also explained that the doors to different areas in the unit were painted different colours in the renovated area to make it easier for mokopuna to orient themselves to where they are. Previously, the door to bedrooms, bathrooms, and laundry room was all the same colour, making it difficult to know which one was which. This is especially important for mokopuna who are neurodivergent. It was a positive to see the residence putting resource into improving the inside environment for mokopuna, as this help promote their wellbeing and creates a more home-like environment.

Under Article 27⁴⁷ of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, all mokopuna have the right to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. It was a positive to see improvements being made to the living conditions for mokopuna at Whakatakapokai.

The outside area of the residence lots of trees and green space

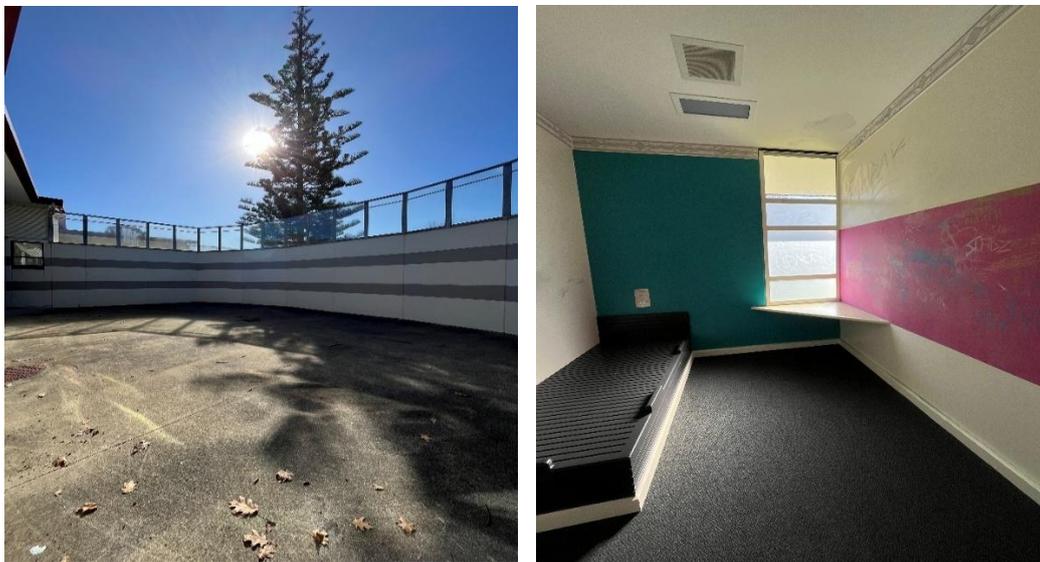
The residence had lots of green space including fruit trees and vegetable gardens. There were multiple courtyards with two full size basketball courts. The main compound area was large with shorter fences, as per the Environment Court conditions, further contributing to a less institution-like feel. It was a positive to see a nice exterior environment for mokopuna, with kai growing and areas for activities for mokopuna to be involved in.

⁴⁷ [Convention on the Rights of the Child | OHCHR](#)



Basketball court (left), outdoor area (right).

Improvements were still needed in the secure care area, as the courtyard looked very prison-like with a lack of any decoration – it is not a mokopuna-friendly space. Kaimahi said the noise echoed in this area, which meant mokopuna bouncing a ball to regulate in the courtyard area was disturbing to other mokopuna in the units next door. It is essential that the residence continues to improve the material conditions of areas such as the secure care courtyard, to make them appropriate to the therapeutic care of mokopuna.



Secure care courtyard area (left), secure care bedrooms (right).



There is a separate area for admissions

There is no dedicated sally-port.⁴⁸ Instead mokopuna entered through the main gate at the front of the residence and kaimahi use the 'green room' for admissions, which was also used for whānau visits, Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) hui and AVL court appearances. The green room had a kitchenette and couches that were comfortable to sit on. Once mokopuna had been admitted, kaimahi would introduce their rights, conduct property checks, and tell them about what to expect when living at the residence.

It was a positive to see mokopuna welcomed to Whakatakapokai in an area that felt more 'home-like', and which has plenty of space for their whānau. This can allow mokopuna to settle and regulate when going through the admission process, a time and process that can be extremely stressful for them and their whānau.



The 'green room' used for admissions, MDT hui, and whānau visits.

There was unrealised potential with the whānau flat at the residence

There was a whānau flat onsite that was separate from the main residence. It had a full kitchen with places for people to sleep. Unfortunately, due to the Environment Court conditions, the flat was unable to be used by whānau with mokopuna at Whakatakapokai as it was deemed to be part of the care and protection residence that is also on-site, Kaahui Whetuu. There were some discussions around using this area for things other than overnight stays for whānau, as kaimahi said the flat has a lot of potential in the care of mokopuna at Whakatakapokai and it would be great to use this area of the facility more.

⁴⁸ sally port is a secure, controlled entryway—usually a specialized garage or enclosed area designed to manage the secure transfer of mokopuna) in and out of the facility.

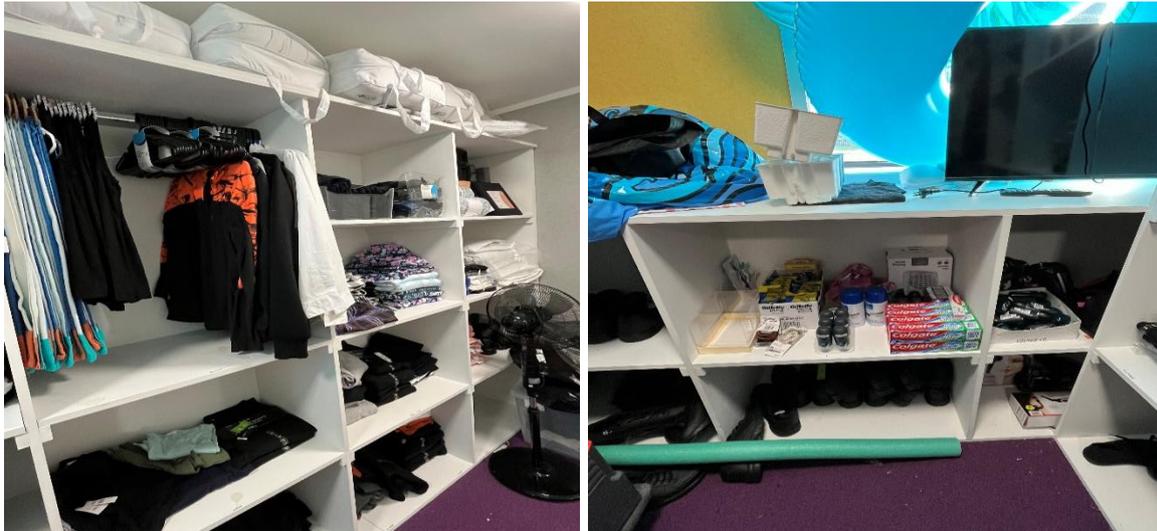


Whānau flat (left), outside field area near the flat (right).

Mokopuna had access to new personal items and could do activities in their bedrooms

Mokopuna had access to a range of resources they could use to help with personal hygiene and selfcare. In the resource area of the residence, mokopuna could get new clothes and toiletries when needed. It included tracksuits, t-shirts, singlets, pyjamas, shoes, shampoo, conditioner, and deodorant. This is particularly important to help mokopuna take pride in their self-care and to access new clothes and shoes, as not all mokopuna come with these things when they enter the residence. Sensory items such as weighted blankets were also listed as a reward that mokopuna could earn as part of the new BMS. However, sensory items that support the therapeutic care of mokopuna, such as weighted blankets, should be something all mokopuna have access to as opposed to being a reward for good behaviour.

Mokopuna were able to listen to music in their bedrooms through the intercom at bedtime, and had access to pencils and paper that they could use to write or draw on in their bedrooms. Mokopuna could also use the intercoms in their bedroom to communicate with kaimahi, and there was an emergency button in their bedrooms that they could use when needed. It was positive to see that mokopuna have access to a range of equipment they could use to occupy their time. Mana Mokopuna would like to see this practice continue.



Resources available for mokopuna.

Mokopuna said they did not enjoy the kai (food) in the residence

Whakatakapokai has a large commercial kitchen and this space is also used to prepare food for Korowai Manaaki, a much larger youth justice residence nearby, which has a 46-bed capacity. Kaimahi said they had recently hired an additional chef as there was only one working on-site for a period of time. Kaimahi who were normally working in the units said they had assisted in the kitchen during this time, to ensure both residences had prepared meals.

Mokopuna said they did not enjoy the kai (food) on offer and said kai such as the boil up “was sh*t.” When asked what their favourite meal was, they said they didn’t really have a favourite but thought that chicken was the best out of all the options. Kaimahi said mokopuna will often ask for meals that aren’t always realistic with their budget, such as lobster, in which case their requests had been turned down. It is essential that mokopuna can continue to have input into the meals they are served, and if their request cannot be accommodated, it is important they are told the rationale behind it.

During the visit, mokopuna were observed not being served morning tea, even though the menu said they were supposed to have fruit. Mana Mokopuna would like to see mokopuna continue to have access to a wide range of nutritious kai on a regular basis to support their growth and overall health and wellness. This is a good area for kaimahi to work with mokopuna to understand the kai that they will enjoy to eat, and to help them to understand what is possible within budget and that will support their nutrition and health.



Medical services and care

This domain focuses on how the physical and mental health rights and needs of mokopuna are met, in order to uphold their wellbeing, privacy and dignity.

Mokopuna at Whakatakapokai had good access to medical care

There were nurses on-site at the residence Monday – Friday, 8am-5pm. Doctors are on-site Monday, Tuesday and Thursday and on-call on Fridays. Doctors were also available on-call daily at a medical centre nearby. Nurses complete health assessments when mokopuna arrive including blood pressure, eyes, ears, dental, and weight checks. Nurses are able to report back any issues with mokopuna health as a result of these checks. Nurses shared an example of one tamaiti getting contact lenses since being admitted to the residence. Mokopuna said they could see nurses when they needed to, and that they could let kaimahi know if they were feeling unwell. Nurses also ran health education sessions for mokopuna, which kaimahi also attended. Nurses at the residence reported having generally good relationships with all kaimahi looking after mokopuna.

Some mokopuna spoke to us about the medications they were on and were aware of the side effects. They said the nurses had been good at answering their questions when required. Social workers said new medications had a positive impact for mokopuna since they were admitted. It is positive that mokopuna in Whakatakapokai had medication that was helpful and supportive for their health needs/conditions and only used when needed.

It is essential that mokopuna have their medical needs catered to adequately while in residence, as they may not always have the opportunity to do so while in the community. It is positive to see mokopuna had regular access to nurses and doctors to help keep them healthy and safe.



The two medical examination rooms.



Mokopuna have a right under Article 24 of the Children's Convention⁴⁹ to access timely medical care. It was a positive to see this right upheld at Whakatakapokai.

Legislation is creating health risks for mokopuna

Regulation 14(4) of the Residential Care Regulations 1996 prevents kaimahi employed by Oranga Tamariki working at Whakatakapokai from administering injection based medications. These medications can only be administered to mokopuna by a nurse, general practitioner or dentist. During our tour of the facility there was a poster in the open unit hub detailing how to administer an EpiPen. When asked who would normally administer these pens, the answer from kaimahi was "anyone with first aid training."

The Mana Mokopuna OPCAT Monitoring team later questioned the Residence Manager about this, who outlined that the nursing team had trained shift leaders in the use of EpiPens in their absence. While this meets a practical need and reality in the care of mokopuna, this contravenes Regulation 14(4) and puts kaimahi at risk of prosecution for breaching this secondary legislation.⁵⁰ Oranga Tamariki National Office clarified that work is underway to amend the Regulations and this will hopefully come into effect mid-2026. This is a positive development that we welcome for the care of mokopuna in residences. In the meantime, the residence is relying on robust medical plans to ensure allergies or conditions such as diabetes are managed well and that the on-site medical practitioners are aware of mokopuna who may require injection-based medications. On-call medical staff may also be made available outside of normal business hours when nurses are not onsite, should kaimahi require assistance.

Mana Mokopuna continues to be concerned that the restrictions in the Regulations could cause delays in administering life-saving medications and that kaimahi working in residences are unsure who should administer them or may be reluctant to administer them, due to the fear of breaking the law and what this could mean for them. While the emphasis from Oranga Tamariki National Office is to prioritise safety of life for mokopuna, initial hesitations or phone calls to on-call nurses could have significant consequences for mokopuna health.

Mana Mokopuna acknowledges changes to legislation are underway in this area and encourages Oranga Tamariki to investigate contracting medical staff to be on-site at all times at Whakatakapokai (and other Oranga Tamariki residences) when mokopuna who have prescribed injection based medicines are living in these residences.

⁴⁹ [Convention on the Rights of the Child | OHCHR](#)

⁵⁰ Secondary legislation, such as regulations, rules, and orders, is legally binding and carries the same weight as an Act of Parliament in the specific areas it covers.



More specialist medical care is required for mokopuna with high and complex needs

Although mokopuna had their primary health care needs met, many kaimahi said more specialist medical care would be beneficial for mokopuna. Given the objectives of the Whakatakapokai operating principles, it is imperative that Oranga Tamariki takes the opportunity to properly assess and put together treatment plans for all mokopuna whilst they are in their care at Whakatakapokai.

There is a forensic team from Tū Māia⁵¹ that comes into the residence on Tuesdays and Thursdays to see mokopuna who have been referred by their case leaders. Mokopuna could access various professionals depending on their needs, such as an occupational therapist for sleep, or a psychiatrist if they needed medication prescribed. Tū Māia also has Māori and Pacific cultural advisors who mokopuna could connect with to help them learn about their culture. Tū Māia kaimahi said it would be helpful to establish regular clinic times with mokopuna, as often their appointment times would often get moved around.

Kaimahi expressed more neurodiversity assessments were still needed, as not all mokopuna had received an official diagnosis yet. There were also no on-site counsellors available for mokopuna at the time of the monitoring visit, which kaimahi also said would be beneficial for mokopuna, given their mental health concerns. More alcohol and drug support was also identified by several kaimahi as an area that mokopuna needed more support in, particularly for nicotine addictions. One tamaiti was receiving whānau therapy, however, this was not available to all mokopuna as it is dependent on their social worker's ability and capacity to approve funding as part of mokopuna court plans. Social workers who we interviewed commented that this type of therapy should be made available to all mokopuna, as it is extremely beneficial to their overall health and healing.

It is important that mokopuna with high and complex needs have ample, consistent access to mental health, and to drug and alcohol support to help lay the foundation for a successful transition back into the community.

⁵¹ [Tū Māia • Healthpoint](#)



Appendix One

Progress on 2024 recommendations

The following table provides an assessment of the progress against the recommendations made by Mana Mokopuna for the previous full OPCAT monitoring visit to Whakatakapokai carried out in February 2024. Mana Mokopuna acknowledges that work on systemic recommendations is led at the Oranga Tamariki National Office level. The progress detailed here relates only to the day-to-day operations of this residence and is assessed on the following scale: **No Progress** | **Limited Progress** | **Some Progress** | **Good Progress** | **Complete**

2024 Systemic Recommendations

	February 2024 Recommendation	Progress as at May 2025
1	Whakatakapokai requires an urgent reset. Mokopuna admissions should remain on hold and priority given to ensure all staff undergo critical training around their core responsibilities to ensure the safety and care of mokopuna.	Complete – A reset occurred after our last visit in February 2024. The residence has since operated at a reduced capacity since this reset, to allow changes to embed. The total number of able to be placed at the residence at the time of this visit is 9 (out of a possible 15 in terms of bed capacity).
2	Te Waharoa induction to be reviewed and updated to ensure it contains practical components and core responsibilities kaimahi are required to carry out when working in residence.	Limited Progress – Whilst the induction programme itself has been reviewed since our last February 2024 visit, kaimahi continued to say the Te Waharoa induction programme did not prepare them for the realities of working in a residence. Some kaimahi said they had been sent to another residence for their Te Waharoa induction, which means they did not receive any specialist training for working with mokopuna who are in their care at Whakatakapokai.
3	Ensure social workers adhere to their practice responsibilities ⁵² for mokopuna and minimum contact visits as per Oranga Tamariki Policy ⁵³ .	Limited Progress – Social worker contact with mokopuna in the residence remains inconsistent, with some mokopuna being visited by their social worker regularly whilst others were not.
4	Prioritise the continuity of care for mokopuna to transition out of residence, through strengthening partnerships with providers currently working in the facility to maintain care and support for mokopuna post residence.	No Progress – None of the mokopuna in the residence had transition plans at the time of the visit. No additional work had been done to strengthen relationships with community-based providers and there was a lack of documented support for continuity of care for mokopuna. This is concerning and needs to be addressed to support successful transitions for mokopuna once they leave Whakatakapokai.
5	A pool of cleaners, a residential trainer, a human resources kaimahi and medical team to be solely employed at Whakatakapokai so resources are not shared with another residence and mokopuna are able to have timely access to support.	Good Progress – Since the last visit, there is a permanent team of medical providers and human resource kaimahi that work at the facility. However, due to a recent restructure, there was only one cleaner employed at the time of the visit and kaimahi said another was needed. Despite this, kaimahi and mokopuna were still able to keep the units clean. Both kaimahi and mokopuna are looking forward to moving into their refurbished units.

⁵² [Allocating a key worker and co-worker | Practice Centre | Oranga Tamariki](#)

⁵³ [Visiting and engaging with tamariki in care | Practice Centre | Oranga Tamariki](#)



2024 Facility Recommendations

	February 2024 Recommendations	Progress as at May 2025
1	Urgently implement a set training day for kaimahi within the current roster to ensure kaimahi practice is in the best interests and safety of mokopuna and documentation is being completed accurately, consistently and in a timely manner.	No Progress – Kaimahi training days continue to be during their rostered day off. The Residence Manager said it was a priority to get the training day as part of their regular roster, however, this had yet to be done at the time of this May 2025 visit. The documentation processes continue to be problematic and often not up to standard as none of the mokopuna had transition plans, Use of Force reviews were incomplete with a significant backlog, and details in incident reports and reports of concern remained inconsistent. There is concern that reports of concern are solely triaged by the Residence Manager rather than the Oranga Tamariki site office located at Homai.
2	Members of senior leadership to be retrained, to ensure there is visibility and support for kaimahi on the floor, to prevent on-going tensions and silos within the residence.	Some Progress – There is a new Residence Manager and Manager Residence Operations (MRO) since our last visit. Progress has been made in reducing the silo between the leadership team and kaimahi in the units, as the leadership team often make themselves visible and available to support them. The new Residence Manager brings a fresh perspective and an acting MRO with good experience. Overall, kaimahi spoke highly of the new leadership team providing clarity and direction. There is a lack of cohesion with the leadership team that needs to be addressed. There is siloed practice between the clinical kaimahi and operations kaimahi, which was raised as an issue on the visit. More work is still required to ensure everyone is working together to move the residence forward.
3	Leadership team to create an action plan alongside the Kaiwhakaue to address the disparities of mokopuna Māori and set measurable outcomes.	Some Progress – Work was being done to rebuild the relationship with mana whenua, which is an important aspect of supporting mokopuna Māori. An action plan to address the disparities of mokopuna Māori was yet to be developed, however, there was work being done to look at strengthening what this could look like through the revitalisation of the operating model project.
4	Allocate a designated room for assessments to occur for mokopuna with professionals, that is readily accessible, can occur without interruption and mokopuna have privacy to complete these.	Complete – The medical staff had access to two rooms they could use for mokopuna medical appointments at the time of the visit.
5	Reinstate MAT hui to occur on a regular basis with all professionals, whānau and mokopuna from admission into the residence until discharge back into the community.	Some Progress – MAT hui were occurring at the time of the visit; however, these were not occurring as regularly as they should be. Whānau were not always invited to these hui and social workers were not always given advance notice of hui being planned and/or did not always attend.
6	Employ a programme coordinator to ensure there is variety and consistency in vocational and interest-based age-appropriate programmes for mokopuna to participate in.	No Progress – There was no Programme Coordinator employed at the time of the visit. Vocational specific programming was also not occurring at the time of this visit, as the café and barista programme had been put on hold until further notice.



Appendix Two

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.	
Interviews and informal discussions with kaimahi and external stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Residence Manager ▪ Residence Manager Operations ▪ Quality Lead ▪ Team Leader Logistics ▪ Senior Psychologist ▪ Rangatahi Mentors ▪ Residential Youth Workers ▪ Team Leader Operations ▪ Grievance Panel ▪ VOYCE Whakarongo Mai ▪ Tū Māia ▪ Kaiarahi (case leaders) ▪ Kingslea School ▪ Odyssey House ▪ Kaiwhakaue ▪ Nurses ▪ All mokopuna whānau were contacted however they did not respond
Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Grievance Quarterly Reports ▪ Serious Event Notifications ▪ My Safety Incident Reports ▪ Search and seizure forms ▪ Report of Concerns ▪ Daily logs and Secure Care logs ▪ Secure care admissions for three months ▪ Incident reports ▪ Use of Force incidents and reviews ▪ Safety Plans ▪ Transition Plans ▪ Remand Reviews



Observations and engagements with mokopuna	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Unit Routines■ Mealtimes■ Community Hui■ Free time■ Activity time■ Secure Care■ Education
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