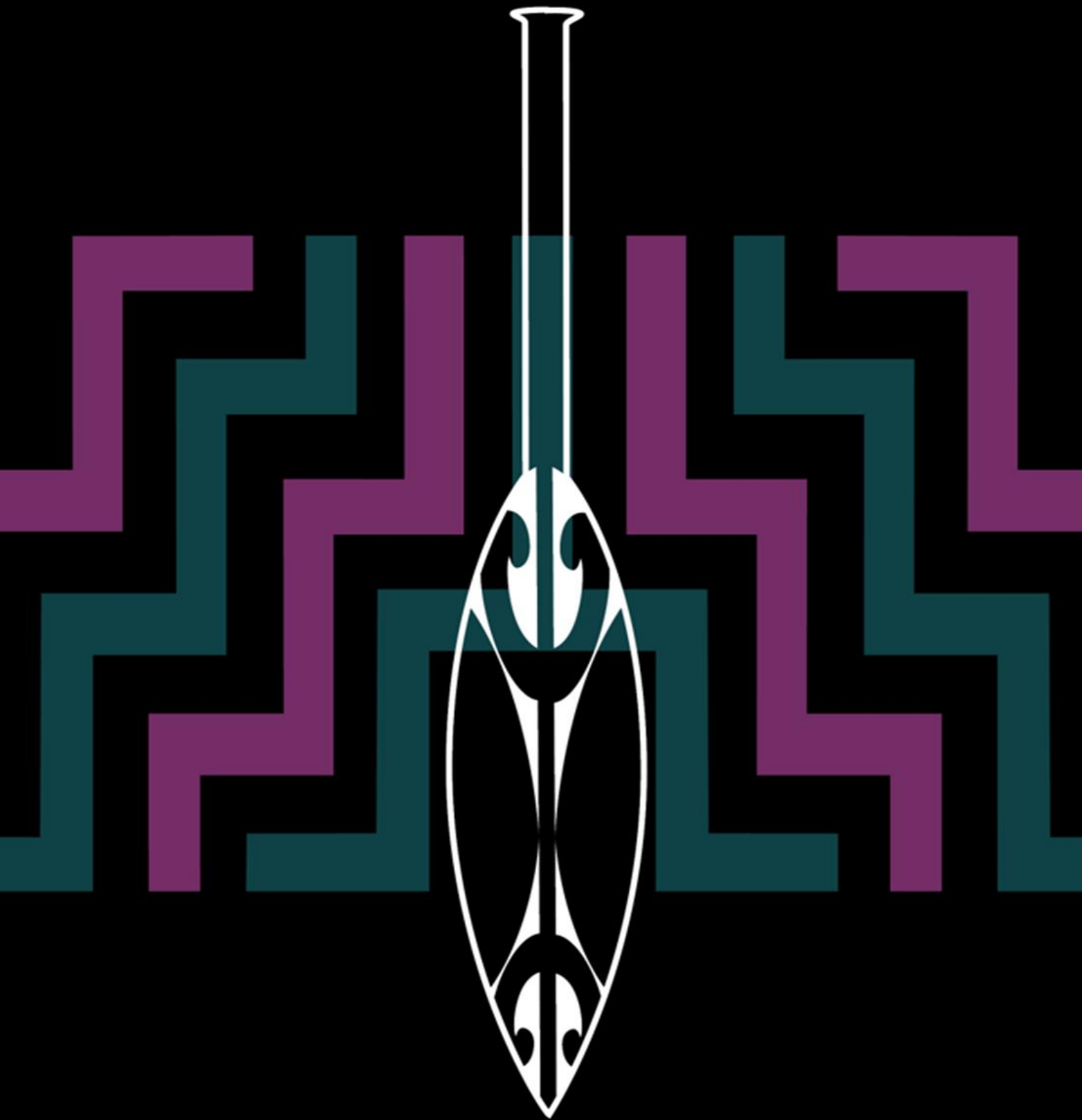




MANA MOKOPUNA
Children's Commissioner

Iti Māpihi Pounamu – Remand Home

OPCAT Monitoring Report

Visit Date: November 2025

Report Date: February 2026

Kia kuru pounamu te rongō

All mokopuna* live their best lives

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

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

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Introduction

The role of Mana Mokopuna – Children's Commissioner

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

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

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

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

About this visit

Mana Mokopuna conducted an announced visit to Iti Māpihi Pounamu Remand Home, operated by Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa, as part of its OPCAT monitoring visit programme. This visit marks the first OPCAT visit for this facility. The objective of our OPCAT Monitoring as an 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.

Iti Māpihi Pounamu is a flagship Rūnanga youth service and the first of its kind in Aotearoa. Located on a 10-acre farm near Cambridge, it offers a rural, nurturing environment where mokopuna can reconnect with the whenua and rebuild their strengths. The whare aims to be

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

self-sustaining, with mokopuna gaining practical skills in areas such as farming and animal care, fencing and general maintenance, and kai gathering and gardening.

About this report

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

Our analysis is guided by the *Mana Mokopuna – Assessment and Engagement Framework*. This framework shapes not only what we assess, but how we engage, interpret, and respond to what we observe. It provides a values-based lens grounded in te ao Māori, ensuring that monitoring centres the rights, dignity, and inherent mana of mokopuna. The Framework is underpinned by six interconnected Mātāpono: *whakapapa*, *whānaungatanga*, *aroha*, *rangatiratanga*, *kaitiakitanga*, and *mātauranga*. These Mātāpono operate alongside the OPCAT domains² and strengthen our monitoring approach by embedding Māori beliefs, relational worldviews, and collective social structures into our analysis.

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

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

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

We are currently revitalising and embedding the *Mana Mokopuna – Assessment and Engagement Framework* across our OPCAT monitoring practice. Its initial application is focused on iwi and kaupapa Māori-run remand homes, with the intention of progressively expanding

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

its use across all areas of our NPM designation. Each Mātāpono is briefly defined in this report to support clarity for readers.

About this facility

Facility Name:	Iti Māpihi Pounamu Remand Home (Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa)
Region:	Kirikiriroa (Hamilton)
Operating capacity:	Capacity is for up to three mokopuna. At the time of this November 2025 monitoring visit, the whare was designated to support kōtiro. The whare is located on a 10 acre rural lifestyle block. Mokopuna are accommodated in individual bedrooms, with shared kitchen, dining, and living spaces supporting daily routines and engagement with kaimahi. There are various animals/ livestock on-site, an extensive garden and a large, converted garage for table tennis and boxing. Live-in kaimahi have their own accommodation area adjacent to the main whare. There was one kōtiro living in the whare at the time of this visit.
Status under which mokopuna are detained: s238(1)(d) of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989	

Key Findings

Mana Mokopuna found no evidence of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment (ill-treatment) during the visit to Iti Māpihi Pounamu Remand Home. We found practice to be exemplary and the visit highlighted the positive effect tikanga-led practice can have on mokopuna experiences in care.

Mana Mokopuna reports the following findings:

Positive practice to highlight:

- Iti Māpihi provide strong, culturally grounded care for mokopuna.
 - Kaimahi provides a stable, nurturing, tikanga-rich environment for mokopuna to thrive.
 - The Rūnanga Pou framework is consistently lived across all daily routines, relationships and decision-making, resulting in a home-like atmosphere where mokopuna feel safe, understood and connected.
- There is high-quality relational practice that enhances mokopuna wellbeing
 - Whānaungatanga is deeply embedded in practice, supported by house parents, kaimahi and frequent leadership team presence.
 - There is excellent access to wider organisational networks and supports to ensure mokopuna and kaimahi hauora.
- Mokopuna voice and participation are meaningfully upheld.
 - Rangatiratanga is visible through mokopuna involvement in daily decisions, activities and transition planning.

- Mokopuna are involved, and actively participate in, shift handovers, meal preparation, farm life and in setting whare routines.
- Mokopuna demonstrated pride in their learning, responsibilities and progress during the monitoring visit.
- Holistic wellbeing is prioritised for both kaimahi and mokopuna.
 - Kaimahi said they have good access to supervision and cultural supports from across Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa.
 - Ensuring mokopuna information is available at the point of admission is a priority to ensure safety and appropriate care planning can occur.
- The whare environment is well maintained and therapeutic
 - The combination of a large home setting, farm area and flexible learning spaces supports emotional regulation and re-engagement with whānau life and routine.

Areas requiring advocacy:

- The future of the whare is uncertain with the lease for the property due to come to an end in 2026. Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa is working hard to come to an arrangement with Waka Kotahi, or source another whare for the service.
- The strength of the physical environment and what it offers mokopuna and kaimahi is an important factor when looking at property alternatives.
- Gaining credits through formal education pathways is an important option for mokopuna. Mana Mokopuna will keep a close eye on how discussions with the Ministry of Education progress in upholding this right for mokopuna.
- Access to independent advocacy mechanisms is important for mokopuna who are in care, and Mana Mokopuna encourages Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa to progress kōrero with organisations like VOYCE Whakarongo Mai to provide this for mokopuna.

Recommendations

2025 Systemic Recommendations

	Recommendation
1	Support where necessary Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa to progress discussions with the Ministry of Education to provide formal opportunities for mokopuna education. When they are living at Iti Mapihi.
2	Ensure all admission information is available to Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa as per their admission form to ensure timely transfer of information and comprehensive care planning.
3	Support where necessary Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa in their discussions to secure a lease to ensure the needs and rights of mokopuna are upheld.

2025 Facility Recommendations

	Recommendation
1	Ensure mokopuna have access to independent advocates. Continue working with VOYCE Whakarongo Mai to establish a schedule of regular contact time for mokopuna with independent advocates.
2	Work with other remand whare within the network to share best practices and approaches regarding mokopuna care.

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 Observations³ for New Zealand's sixth periodic review on its implementation of the Children's Convention⁴ 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 Observations⁵ for New Zealand's seventh periodic review regarding the implementation of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment⁶.

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

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

⁴ [Convention on the Rights of the Child | OHCHR](#)

⁵ Refer CAT/C/NZL/CO/7 [G2315464.pdf](#)

⁶ [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment | OHCHR](#)

Detailed findings by Mātāpono

Whakapapa



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

The model of care at Iti Māpihi Pounamu is underpinned by Te Ao Māori practice

Iti Māpihi Pounamu is a youth justice remand home that is led by Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa and is one of the many youth services offered through the organisation. Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa offers a range of health and social wellbeing services dedicated to holistic wellbeing and the development of all whānau. The Rūnanga operates through a distinct cultural framework that is whānau-first, tikanga based, with a wellbeing approach that is built around four Rūnanga Pou. These pou are Whānaungatanga, Manaakitanga, Arohatanga, and Rangatiratanga and they are underpinned by the guiding principles of Tika and Pono. These pou are the living foundation of practice across all Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa services and embedded in the way the Iti Māpihi Pounamu youth justice remand home operates.

All kaimahi across Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa including Iti Māpihi Pounamu kaimahi undergo intensive wānanga on these pou upon joining the organisation. This ensures a consistent understanding of how tikanga informs daily interactions, decision-making, and responses to challenges when working with all whānau. The pou articulate how people are expected to interact within the Rūnanga whānau providing a cohesive practice framework of shared values across all services and teams within Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa. Pertaining to Iti Māpihi Pounamu specifically, kaimahi at every level were able to articulate how the pou inform not only their practice with mokopuna but also their relationships with each other.

The Pou Tikanga team within the Rūnanga performs a vital cultural-advisory function, maintaining cultural integrity and ensuring tikanga is applied safely and consistently across all services. The team supports the Iti Māpihi Pounamu where directly, offering guidance to kaimahi around tikanga practice for education, activities, haerenga, karakia, and whaikōrero, and ensuring cultural safety for both kaimahi and rangatahi. They also determine appropriate cultural representation, ensuring suitable kaimahi-to-mokopuna ratios when tikanga or spiritual matters are involved.

With this structure, the pou become behavioural guidelines shaping how care is planned and conducted for mokopuna within Iti Māpihi Pounamu. Mana Mokopuna found consistent

application of the pou framework by everyone working in the whare with mokopuna either able to explain the tikanga or showing it through their actions.

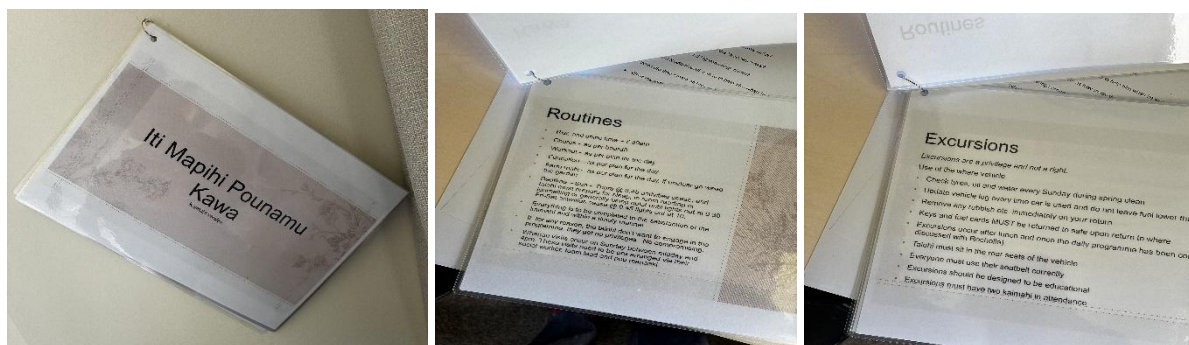


(Te Runanga o Kirikiriroa Pou displayed as posters in the whare).

Kawa and Tikanga are lived at Iti Māpihi Pounamu

Within the Iti Māpihi Pounamu whare there is a clear kawa, developed collectively by kaimahi and supported by the Pou Tikanga team that establishes clear expectations about daily life, safety, responsibilities, and respectful conduct.

Kawa booklets are readily accessible in each mokopuna bedroom, the kaimahi room, and as an online document. These outline how to live well within the whare providing clarity, routine, and predictability for mokopuna. Kaimahi use the same kawa as reference points reinforcing coherence between kaimahi and the mokopuna they support. Mana Mokopuna observed a cohesive and well-connected team environment at Iti Māpihi Pounamu suggesting that the kawa are lived rather than held as paperwork. Practices such as shared karakia, structured routines and timetables, informed educational programmes and activities, and regular whare whānau kōrero embody the kawa of the whare and the Rūnanga Pou. Mana Mokopuna observed a well-connected, confident kōtiro within the whare that was able confidently navigate whare-life and adhere to whare kawa and tikanga.



(Mokopuna Kawa booklet and examples of content and expectations)

Whakapapa informed referral practice

Kaimahi managing the whare have developed a referral form that must be completed by Oranga Tamariki social workers before mokopuna arrive at the whare. The referral process is guided by tikanga principles that reflect a whakapapa-based responsibility that ensures mokopuna are known before they enter Iti Māpihi Pounamu. If the form is not completed correctly, kaimahi ensure this is addressed by Oranga Tamariki to meet the kawa of the whare before mokopuna are welcomed into the whare. Details expected via the referral form are mokopuna whakapapa connections, health and medical needs, safety and care information, educational information, and general information about the mokopuna that will help kaimahi understand mokopuna holistic needs. Completion of this information allows the whare to best prepare for mokopuna arrival ensuring a culturally grounded and informed plan is developed pre-arrival so that mokopuna can safely settle into the whare environment as quickly as possible.

Iti Māpihi Pounamu kaimahi shared that the referral process is not always upheld by external agencies. Kaimahi reported several instances where incomplete or inaccurate referral information created potential risks for mokopuna and kaimahi themselves. In one case, a mokopuna arrived with significant undisclosed medical needs that required immediate care. Collectively, kaimahi addressed the needs and co-ordinated care for te tamaiti, but significant stress could have been avoided had this information been received at the earliest opportunity.

Kaimahi said they often draw on the principles of Manaakitanga and Kaitiakitanga to bridge information gaps to meet the needs of mokopuna. Whilst kaimahi do feel the pressure to gather information (that they should receive from Oranga Tamariki) it does speak to the team's deep commitment to recognising mokopuna whakapapa and mana rather than viewing them merely as cases. Iti Māpihi Pounamu kaimahi expressed that the timely and accurate sharing of mokopuna information is a priority to ensure mokopuna safety is paramount.

Access to Pou Tikanga provides confidence in practice

Kaimahi regularly engage with the Pou Tikanga to test their thinking, reflect on actions, and ensure that decisions are aligned with the Rūnanga Pou. This access to cultural mentorship strengthens practice integrity and provides shared responsibility within tikanga parameters. An example of this in practice was observed by the Mana Mokopuna team through educational activities. When appropriate, kaimahi are able to test thinking to ensure cultural risks are mitigated and appropriate tikanga is applied.

Mokopuna also benefit directly from this resource. Where appropriate, they participate in tikanga-based activities led by Pou Tikanga members, such as wānanga, karakia, waiata and or support in spiritual and emotional matters. This access strengthens cultural safety and supports healing through tikanga. An example of this was explained through a recent haerenga to Kāwhia. Kaimahi shared with us the intentional outline of the day which had a focus on reconnecting te tamaiti to their Iwi history and roots. There were also planned fun activities that could take place in the rohe. Appropriate and trusted kaimahi for te tamaiti were

brought on board to deliver the day outline and ensure cultural safety and practice would be upheld.

Pūrakau and hītori were also told during the haerenga and te tamaiti was able to retain mātauranga and pūrakau and relayed them back to the Mana Mokopuna team. Te tamaiti also shared with Mana Mokopuna a diary entry where they were able to reflect on details of the history, multiple stories related to geographical sites around Kāwhia and was able to articulate how the trip made them feel stronger in their Iwitanga.

Mana Mokopuna commends the way Iti Māpihi Pounamu kaimahi are able to use tikanga or clear expectations with mokopuna to provide them with opportunities to connect to whakapapa and te ao Māori. Mana Mokopuna highlights this as excellent practice and a clear way mokopuna can thrive in the care of kaimahi working at Iti Māpihi Pounamu.

Māori informed systems of care

The integration of the Rūnanga Pou, consistent kawa, and accessible tikanga guidance means mokopuna enter a space that is already woven with tikanga. They experience stable boundaries, expert cultural safety and kaimahi who are clear on providing a sense of belonging within an environment that mirrors whānau principles.

As the organisational whakapapa is explicit and lived, mokopuna learn that identity and connection are upheld as protective factors. The coherent organisational leadership for kaimahi working directly with and for mokopuna demonstrates what it means to hold space and provide a high-quality level of care for mokopuna within a Te Ao Māori based system of care.

Whānaungatanga



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

Whānau based organisational approach

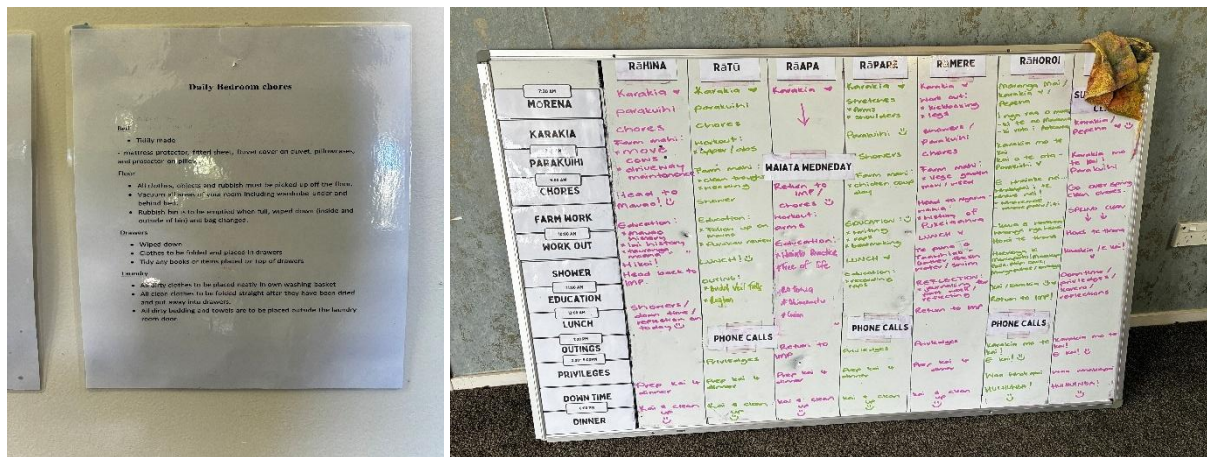
Across Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa (Te Rūnanga), whānaungatanga is not viewed as a value on the wall or a skill, instead it is viewed as a way of being. The organisation functions as a connected whānau system in which everyone contributes to mokopuna wellbeing, regardless of their role or team. Kaimahi described how no one works in silos and that they can readily call on Whānaunga from other Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa teams to share knowledge, provide cultural support, or assess thinking. This collective approach enriches practice, strengthens relationships, and ensures that mokopuna benefit from a wide range of role models and experts, not just the kaimahi working in the whare.

Being part of a whānau is constantly role modelled to mokopuna. The whānau can be those in the whare or those in the boarder organisation and involvement in daily routines is expected. Mokopuna are always centred at the heart of the organisation whether that involves helping in the whare kitchen or participating in whole of Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa events. Mokopuna experience first hand how they can positively contribute to daily life at all levels, whether that is in informal or formal settings, providing many opportunities to grow connections and feel a sense of belonging. An example of this is through weekly waiata practice which brings together kaimahi and other mokopuna from across Rūnanga services, reinforcing connection to Te Reo Māori and cultural identity. Other organisation wide events such as Matariki, Te Wiki o te Reo Māori, Koroneihana, and participation in local Pōukai, in line with local Iwi and Kiingitanga, strengthens cultural ties, celebrates whakapapa, and provides spaces for mokopuna growth.

These kaupapa are also used as reflective learning opportunities, connecting kaimahi and mokopuna to pūrākau and values of tūpuna that guide their own practice. The organisation approaches these occasions as whānau setting intentions collectively.

Connected daily life and shared experiences

At Iti Māpihi Pounamu, house parents play an anchoring role in the whare providing consistency, stability, and warmth in their care. Their presence and relational style embody whānau care, creating an environment that feels like a whānau rather than an institution or girls home. Kaimahi, house parents, and mokopuna cook, eat, and clean together, following kawa that emphasises reciprocity and respect. These shared activities create naturally occurring engagements that foster aroha and Kotahitanga.



(Chores and shared activities are clear for everyone)

During meals and chores, mokopuna and kaimahi share stories, practice tikanga, karakia and waiata, and collectively engage in ways that enrich the whare environment and mokopuna development. Observations from the monitoring visit found that everyone present from the whare leadership team and kaimahi to visiting property maintenance kaimahi all modelled engagement with mokopuna in positive ways, demonstrating the depth of whānaungatanga across the organisation.

Relationship and role modelling

Mokopuna are surrounded by a network of positive adult role models within Iti Māpihi Pounamu whare and across the wider Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa whānau. Kaimahi lead by example through care, transparency, and humour, showing mokopuna that relationships grounded in trust and mutual respect are possible and sustainable.

This visible consistency helps mokopuna learn to develop trust in adults providing much needed stability in relationships. Kaimahi described learning from each other every day from both peers and mokopuna and enjoy being able to reflect on practice, share feedback openly, and keep each other accountable within tikanga. Through these dynamics, mokopuna witness whānaungatanga in action which can provide a grounding post for their eventual return to their own whānau and community.

Maintaining connection with whānau

Connection to whānau is prioritised at Iti Māpihi Pounamu and is viewed as essential to mokopuna wellbeing. Kaimahi facilitate and manaaki whānau visits wherever possible, ensuring the whare remains open and welcoming to extended whānau of mokopuna. Approved whānau members have regular contact through daily phone calls, and kaimahi assist with coordination of transport and accommodation when needed to ensure kanohi-ki-te-kanohi contact happens.

Kaimahi noted that whānau engagement helps mokopuna to maintain identity and purpose,

even when relationships are complex. During times where communication is limited, and when information is not readily available, kaimahi work to bridge that gap and build connections with relevant whānau members or community providers. Kaimahi consistently reiterated that that belonging and connection are key elements in mokopuna development.

Mana Mokopuna highlights the excellent way whānau contact is maintained and prioritised at Iti Māpihi Pounamu. We encourage Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa to share their operational guidance with other organisations running remand where across the motu as a way to share experiences and collegially upskill and lift practice in this area.

Rangatiratanga



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

Promoting mokopuna voice and participation

Rangatiratanga is strongly embedded in the practice culture of Iti Māpihi Pounamu. Operationally the whare is designed to be mokopuna-centric, consistently encouraging mokopuna to express their views and take part in everyday decision making at the whare. Kaimahi said that a key element to mokopuna successfully transitioning into the whare and their continued personal development is “having real say in how the whare runs.” Daily routines, tasks, activities, and responsibilities are shaped through open kōrero between kaimahi and mokopuna and Mana Mokopuna saw this in action every day the team was onsite.

A particularly strong practice within Iti Māpihi Pounamu is mokopuna involvement in shift handovers. Mokopuna are invited to share how their day went, what went well, and what could be better in the whare. This approach validates their experiences, affirms their right to be heard, and upholds mokopuna participation. During observations, te tamaiti demonstrated confidence in speaking with kaimahi including Mana Mokopuna monitors, about their learning during their time at Iti Māpihi Pounamu whare, the tasks they enjoy, and some of their achievements. Kaimahi shared that mokopuna often help choose off-site activities based on interests, otherwise kaimahi suggest activities that relate to mokopuna whakapapa or whānau interests.

Mana Mokopuna found that mokopuna take pride in explaining their experiences at Iti Māpihi Pounamu whare whether feeding animals, completing whare chores, creating music or reflecting on haerenga to significant historic sites. This opportunity to eagerly share their learning without prompt was viewed by the Mana Mokopuna team as a sign of empowerment and upholding of mana for mokopuna.

Preparing mokopuna for next steps

Every aspect of practice at Iti Māpihi Pounamu is designed to prepare mokopuna for their next stage of life whether it be returning to whānau, transitioning to another placement, or returning to community and moving toward independence. The Iti Māpihi Pounamu team emphasise developing mokopuna self-management skills as a central goal rather than a secondary outcome.

Through structured daily routines, kaimahi teach tools that build confidence and soft skills like money management, cooking, household care, emotional regulation, and interpersonal communication. These are not treated as tasks to complete but as opportunities to practice

and grow mokopuna capability and mana.

This approach is underpinned by the Rūnanga Pou that, as kaimahi acknowledge, comes once trust and care is established with mokopuna. By the time a tamaiti is preparing to leave Iti Māpihi Pounamu, the aim is that they understand their plans moving forward, who their supports are, and have the confidence to engage with processes, such as Family Group Conferences⁷ (FGC), court appearances or returning to whānau with the added life skills they have gained through participating in daily routines with kaimahi support and leadership.

Role of Pou Manaaki in supporting leadership

The Pou Manaaki is based in the whare and plays a pivotal role in ensuring mokopuna voices are recognised and heard within a space that can sometimes be lost on mokopuna. Acting as the key liaison between Oranga Tamariki social workers, the Oranga Tamariki placement team, Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa and the whare, the Pou Manaaki ensures communication is clear and that mokopuna are not caught between gaps in systems.

Mana Mokopuna saw how the Pou Manaaki walks and supports mokopuna through periods of transition, by attending FGCs, providing support during bail hearings, and providing advocacy where needed. This continuity of care from kaimahi delivering day-to-day care and engagement with the Pou Manaaki highlights the effectiveness of the whānau driven operational approach of Iti Māpihi Pounamu.

Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa and the Iti Māpihi Pounamu whare leadership team acknowledged challenges in receiving timely information about mokopuna and decisions made prior to admission. They noted that these delays affected their ability to prepare for admissions and manage the expectations of mokopuna and their whānau. Despite these system barriers, kaimahi worked to mitigate their impact by actively involving mokopuna and their whānau in decisions and matters affecting them throughout the care process.

Independent advocacy and systemic barriers

While internal advocacy through kaimahi and the leadership team is strong at Iti Māpihi Pounamu, access to independent advocates remains an area where advocacy can be strengthened. At the time of this November 2025 visit, Iti Māpihi Pounamu did not have an active relationship with the independent advocacy organization VOYCE Whakarongo Mai⁸ who focus on mokopuna in care however both the Youth Services Manager and Pou Manaaki had already identified this as an important future focus.

Establishing consistent contact with an independent advocate for mokopuna would reinforce autonomy and independence as well as strengthening rangatiratanga for mokopuna. Mana

⁷ The Family Group Conference is a legislated hui that is convened under s247 of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989. They are designed to bring mokopuna, whānau, support services, professionals and, where appropriate, victims around the table to discuss a plan or way forward for mokopuna.

⁸ [Home - VOYCE - WHAKARONGO MAI](#)

Mokopuna recommends Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa establish a relationship with VOYCE Whakarongo Mai and support regular onsite visits for their Kaiwhakamana (youth support workers) to Iti Māpihi Pounamu, so that mokopuna have access to independent advocacy.

Aroha



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

Hauora as the foundation for aroha

The holistic wellbeing of mokopuna is treated as a collective responsibility. From the moment a new referral is made, kaimahi consider the holistic needs of the mokopuna to ensure physical health, nutritional needs are met, emotional and mental wellbeing factors are considered and that cultural and spiritual needs are written into mokopuna plans.

Mokopuna can arrive at the whare with very little information about their wellbeing and support needs, and kaimahi work hard to fill these information gaps to ensure mokopuna receive the appropriately tailored care. The Lead Clinician from Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa oversees all medical and mental health matters, administers any prescribed medication, and provides clinical guidance to kaimahi regarding all mokopuna presentations and support needs.

House parents play a key role in health promotion, developing weekly food menus and inviting mokopuna to contribute ideas to help with meal preparation. Mana Mokopuna observed grocery shopping being unpacked in the whare kitchen where kōrero about items, ingredients and favourite foods were discussed between mokopuna, house parents and kaimahi. Mana Mokopuna could see how the preferences of mokopuna were taken into consideration and the care with which food was discussed and prepared.

Mana Mokopuna saw evidence of the prioritisation of holistic wellbeing of mokopuna reflected in things like kaimahi following up on information gaps, understanding physical and nutritional needs of mokopuna, connecting mokopuna to their whakapapa and empowering mokopuna to contribute to decision-making, which is how aroha is operationalised within daily practice at Iti Māpihi Pounamu.

Aroha as emotional safety

Kaimahi, house parents, and the whare leadership team all model aroha in their connections with mokopuna. They speak calmly, use humour, and show patience even when managing challenging behaviours. Mana Mokopuna could see how reassurance and support is provided whenever change or uncertainty arises. Kaimahi told Mana Mokopuna how this is most evident during transitions back to whānau or during court processes. Kaimahi described moments where they intentionally sit with mokopuna and work through their distress or confusion. Kaimahi said that understanding that presence and active listening can provide calm for mokopuna and is a tangible way to express aroha during times when mokopuna feel most

vulnerable or isolated. Mana Mokopuna observed times when kaimahi continually reassured mokopuna emphasising that they will not be judged or isolated during times of distress. It was pleasing to see and hear that the whānau environment continued to wrap around mokopuna, even when situations were challenging and mokopuna presented with frustration and anger.

Kaitiakitanga



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

Stability of the whare sustains mokopuna wellbeing

Care at Iti Māpihi Pounamu is delivered through the living application of the Rūnanga Pou - Whānaungatanga, Manaakitanga, Arohatanga, and Rangatiratanga, and grounded in Tika and Pono. These Pou are the foundation for all interactions at Iti Māpihi Pounamu, and shapes how kaimahi care for each other and for mokopuna.

The collective whakaaro across the whare is that “if the environment is right, mokopuna can flourish.” This belief is evident in kaimahi practice observed by Mana Mokopuna through respectful communication and interactions between mokopuna and kaimahi. This was especially noticeable during shared kai, whare routines, education activities and general kōrero around the whare throughout the visit.

House parents form the heart of the whare. The consistency of kai preparation, farm maintenance, and evening routines are predictable and calming for mokopuna. Mokopuna know where to find the daily routine timetable, know what the movements are for the day, who is coming in on the next shift, and help to create the menu for the week. House parents also serve as first aid responders and are the health and safety representatives for the whare. Exceptional shift kaimahi work alongside house parents to maintain consistency in care for mokopuna creating informed activities that are tikanga-based and address aspects of life that are important to mokopuna such as identity and culture. Kaimahi ensure continuous care with thorough handovers and consistently centre mokopuna needs.

The Pou Manaaki also provides advocacy and on-going support for mokopuna during and after their time at Iti Māpihi Pounamu. The Pou Manaaki alongside the Youth Services Manager for Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa are actively building and maintaining relationships with external providers such as Ministry of Education, Te Kura, and the Oranga Tamariki Placement Team ensuring smooth transitions for mokopuna coming in and leaving the whare. Kaimahi know how unsettling periods of transition are for mokopuna and explained how they actively prepare and plan when phone calls, hui and any form of engagements involving mokopuna are scheduled. Kaimahi said they become acutely aware of mokopuna behaviour triggers and take care to ensure the right kind of support is available at the right time for mokopuna. The Pou Manaaki also offer supports for kaimahi navigating complex situations when working with mokopuna. They can support kaimahi with professional development and supervision offered through Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa. Across the wider organisation, the presence of the Tikanga Team adds another layer of cultural safety and restorative balance when the whare or whānau

wairua needs (re)grounding.

Visible leadership and kaimahi support

Leadership visibility within the whare is strong. The Youth Services Manager, whare Team Leader, and the Pou Manaaki are actively present onsite, and have formed strong relationships with mokopuna and kaimahi, contributing to routines, providing debriefing sessions, and ensuring kaimahi wellbeing.

Supervision is regular and accessible for all kaimahi working with mokopuna and helps to maintain professional competence and confidence in delivering trauma-informed and tikanga-based care. Induction processes reinforce the Rūnanga Pou framework, and access to the wider Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa team, gives kaimahi added confidence that their holistic needs can be met whether that's inside or outside of their immediate work team. Kaimahi reported feeling that leaders "walk the talk" when modelling care for mokopuna and living out the Pou Rūnanga.

Regular wānanga between kaimahi occur naturally in the whare, and mātauranga, practice and experiences are shared. Internal learning sessions occur regularly and there is flexibility to increase these when there are no mokopuna living in the whare. Kaimahi said during these times they take the opportunity to workshop and role play scenarios, complete Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI) training, and complete any other refresher training. Kaimahi said they felt fully supported by their leadership team regarding training, and believed they wanted the best for their kaimahi, which in turn, enables a high level of holistic care for mokopuna.

The whare and farm create positive environment for mokopuna

Iti Māpihi Pounamu is well-resourced, with a comfortable, home-like environment that upholds Manaakitanga and safety. Bedrooms are tidy, naturally lit, and mokopuna can personalise them to make the space their own. Shared spaces include a large main open living area with a lounge, kitchen, and study room. The living area has large floor to ceiling French doors that can connect the space to the outdoor area which has picnic tables, extra seating, and a swimming pool area. Beyond the kitchen is a dining room and second large lounge used as a quiet space away from the main living area. The study room is filled with activity options from a library of books, board games, and other recreational items that encourage play and connection through fun.

The whare is located on a farm setting that provides mokopuna with access to open space, animals, and māra kai. Kaimahi acknowledged the farm as a therapeutic asset that nurtures wairua and supports reconnection with land and routine. Mana Mokopuna observed great engagement from mokopuna with the farm. Mokopuna were enthusiastic in sharing their responsibilities with care for the chickens, dealing with a grumpy rooster, and collecting eggs.



(Inside and outside areas at Iti Māpihi Pounamu)

Whilst the whare and farm have positive benefits for mokopuna, the whare is facing uncertainty regarding its long-term location, as the current lease is due to end at the end of 2026 with the prospect of it not being renewed. The house is leased from Waka Kotahi and there is a proposed highway development which may require the home and farm asset. While the leadership for Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa is actively negotiating extensions and searching for alternative sites, there is some anxiety among kaimahi about the potential disruption to the whare service. It is crucial, in the view of Mana Mokopuna, that an appropriate similar property can be secured so that mokopuna can access the same level of care as they currently do in the whare.

Iti Māpihi Pounamu exemplifies Kaitiakitanga through strong relationships, visible leadership in the whare, and prioritising hauora of both mokopuna and kaimahi. The heart of care lies in creating and protecting the conditions in which people can succeed. While external uncertainties and systemic pressures persist, the depth of Kaitiakitanga within the whare expressed through consistent application of the Rūnanga Pou, reflects a practice of sustained, mana-enhancing care.

Mātauranga



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

Learning through everyday life

Kaimahi consistently integrate Mātauranga into everyday routines and expectations within the whare. Learning starts at admission, where mokopuna are introduced to the whare kawa and tikanga. Iti Māpihi Pounamu operate in a whānau-like model where everyone contributes to the whare which supports mokopuna understanding expectations, routines, and how shared living operates within whānau values.

Whilst kawa is established at admission how mātauranga is disseminated is both formal and informal as Iti Māpihi Pounamu kaimahi utilise “teachable moments” to form the basis of daily practice. Kaimahi work alongside mokopuna in all activities, not as supervisors but as active participants in the tuakana teina relationship. These experiences include farm chores, whare maintenance, and collective responsibilities such as cleaning, preparing kai, and caring for animals. All of which provide key life skills for mokopuna.

A whiteboard in the whare displays the daily timetable and task rotations for both kaimahi and mokopuna. This visually helps mokopuna track their own responsibilities and progress on tasks. Mokopuna were able to share that they had missed feeding the chickens one morning when checking the timetable and was able to quickly complete the task. Kaimahi shared that mokopuna often take pride in completing and marking off tasks feeling a sense of achievement and contribution.

Kaimahi described this approach as “building up mokopuna” by using structured, achievable tasks to foster a sense of contribution, autonomy, and responsibility for mokopuna. Kaimahi expressed this was to ensure life-skills for mokopuna are embedded in preparation for life after Iti Māpihi Pounamu. Kaimahi recognise that each interaction with mokopuna, be it education, playing games or house chores, offers an opportunity to model positive behaviour, encourage independence and self-discipline and give mokopuna important skills for life.

Learning through culture and connection

All learning activities at Iti Māpihi Pounamu are guided by an Ao Māori lens, deeply connected to whenua and whakapapa. Kaimahi connect mokopuna to te taiao (the environment), iwi histories, and pūrākau through storytelling and experiential learning.

Off-site activities where mokopuna learn directly from significant places, helps to reconnect many mokopuna to their own whakapapa or that of local mana whenua. Kaimahi can recount

stories explaining local history of mana whenua, pūrākau of significant sites such as awa, maunga and other geographical places, as well as myths and legends. Much of this learning is done through wānanga, hiking, swimming, and sharing kai. Kaimahi are also able to deliver educational activities at the whare using personal talents and experience such as mau rakau and music production and this was observed by Mana Mokopuna during this November 2025 visit. Mana Mokopuna observed mokopuna fully engaged and focused in a mau rākau session as the kaimahi applied tikanga to the session through karakia and instilling discipline and mindfulness through the teachings. There was visible pride as te tamaiti was able to experience a sense of achievement through execution of movements. What was noticeable was the ability of kaimahi to maintain focus of mokopuna throughout the session demonstrating the value of the traditional artform.

Like the opportunities to engage in mau rākau, mokopuna were able to engage in music production as part of their education programme with the same focus and achievement. This was done through the process of song making where mokopuna were supported to produce original music using digital audio tools, to make beats, compose original lyrics, and record their own waiata or rap. Kaimahi were able to support mokopuna to complete a full song in a single day during this November 2025 onsite visit. Kaimahi have become very skilled in weaving in literacy and numeracy into a variety of activities and settings, which creates a very positive learning development environment for mokopuna.

Formal education and future planning

While the learning framework at Iti Māpihi Pounamu is culturally grounded and enriched by talented kaimahi, it currently sits outside the formal education system as it is delivered by kaimahi themselves rather than registered teachers and mokopuna are not registered for homeschooling. Whilst efforts are made to deliver meaningful education to mokopuna, kaimahi identified a need for mokopuna to be able to gain recognised credits for their daily learning. At the time of this November 2025 monitoring visit, Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa and the Ministry of Education were in active discussions to establish a partnership with Te Kura (The Correspondence School) to strengthen educational pathways for mokopuna living at Iti Māpihi Pounamu. This would enable mokopuna to obtain NCEA or unit standard credits while residing at the whare. The Youth Service Manager and the Pou Manaaki were optimistic that this collaboration would begin in 2026.

One challenge of offering educational pathways to mokopuna when length of stay in the whare is variable, was highlighted as another challenge. Some placements at Iti Māpihi Pounamu last a few weeks, others several months. Nevertheless, the team continues to advocate strongly for mokopuna education through its current culturally grounded and personalised teaching delivery.

Education, although not accredited, is living and relational

Mana Mokopuna found that learning occurs at Iti Māpihi Pounamu through connection, contribution, storytelling, and reflection. Although formal education accreditation gaps remain, the quality of mokopuna engagement and the depth of learning through relationships, culture, and real-world tasks, are exemplary. This approach supports confidence building, skill development, and re-engagement with learning for many mokopuna, who in some cases, have not engaged in any form of education for some time.

Iti Māpihi Pounamu kaimahi offer a wide range of education, be it informal or formal, that is context based and is embedded in whānau life, whenua, and culture. Having the whare located on a farm section means mokopuna learn to fence, maintain the grounds, and feed and care for animals. An extension of this occurs within the whare where chores are done daily and mokopuna support kaimahi with shopping lists, menu for the week, and food preparation. Through wānanga and the arts, mokopuna learn history and culture and how to express themselves through creativity. For some mokopuna disconnected from education systems this approach to learning gives them strong tangible successes to build upon when exiting the Iti Māpihi Pounamu whare, positively equipping them for their pathway into the future with a way of being, consistent with the Rūnanga Pou.

Appendix One

Gathering information

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

Method	Role
Interviews and informal discussions with mokopuna.	
Interviews and informal discussions with kaimahi and external stakeholders	■ Pou Manaaki ■ Youth Services Manager ■ Team Leader for Iti Māpihi Pounamu whare ■ Lead Clinician ■ Pou Tikanga Lead Team – Te Ata Hāpara o Hine Ruhe ■ House Parents Iti Māpihi ■ Kaimahi - Youth Workers ■ Mokopuna ■ Youth Mentors
Documentation	■ Admission form ■ Referral questionnaire ■ Risk Assessment and Mitigation forms ■ Accident register ■ Room search register and process ■ Kawa – Kaimahi version ■ Kawa – Taiohi version ■ Cleaning list
Observations and engagements with mokopuna	■ Daily routines and mealtimes ■ Handovers and whare hui ■ Free time ■ Farm chores ■ Education sessions