



MANA MOKOPUNA
Children's Commissioner

Epuni Care and Protection Residence **OPCAT Monitoring Report**

Visit date: March 2026
Report date: June 2026

Kia kuru pounamu te rongō

All mokopuna* live their best lives

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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 unannounced follow-up visit to Epuni Care and Protection Residence (Epuni) between 24 and 26 March 2026 as part of the NPM monitoring programme. The objective of our OPCAT Monitoring as the 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 by mokopuna in these facilities.

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.

About this report

This report shares the findings from the monitoring visit and recommends actions to address any issues identified as well as measure progress on recommendations made as part of the previous full visit in March 2025. 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 on-site visit.

About this facility

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

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

Summary key findings

Mana Mokopuna found no evidence of cruel, inhumane, degrading treatment or punishment (ill-treatment) during the visit to Epuni. It was clear during our visit that progress had been made in several key areas.

Mana Mokopuna notes that at the time of this March 2026 OPCAT Monitoring visit, kaimahi were very concerned regarding mokopuna being admitted into Epuni with very high and complex needs that required bespoke care that they felt was beyond their training and collective capability. These mokopuna were required to be housed, at different times, in a unit largely by themselves due to their vulnerabilities, potential for violence, or to protect the safety of other mokopuna residing at Epuni. There was an admission of a mokopuna between December 2024 and March 2025 that met this very high threshold and Mana Mokopuna was informed of another admission of this nature occurring after this on-site visit in April 2026,

whilst this report was being written. Mana Mokopuna understands that these placement referrals were directed by Oranga Tamariki National Office with the knowledge that mokopuna would need to be separated from others. These placement decisions are made outside of the control of the Eponi residence leadership team but have a very significant impact on mokopuna being placed under these conditions and the kaimahi working to care for them in the residence. Situations like these highlight the need for a responsive care and placement continuum that requires systemic input from several government agencies in order for mokopuna to receive the care that is their right and therefore adequately meets their needs. Mana Mokopuna encourages Oranga Tamariki to formalise a system-wide response with key agencies such as Health New Zealand – Te Whatu Ora, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha and Disability Support Services, to ensure appropriate care for mokopuna that meets their specific needs in ways that are consistent with their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Positive findings from the March 2026 Eponi visit:

- There is now a permanent residence manager to help provide stability and set clear expectations for kaimahi working in the residence and improving mokopuna care.
- Mokopuna said they had trusted kaimahi that they felt comfortable speaking with.
- The material conditions have improved since our last March 2025 visit:
 - The courtyards had been repainted and upgraded
 - Renovations had been made to the pool with work soon to begin on the gym
 - Mokopuna had new memory foam mattresses in their bedrooms
 - New resources for activities such as bikes and kayaks were stored on-site.
- Mokopuna were spending time outside and attending offsite programmes and activities in the local community.
- Kaimahi ora (employee wellbeing) is a priority:
 - Rongoā Māori sessions have been provided
 - There was an on-site gym for kaimahi to use
 - There was a new internally developed '*Emerging Leaders*' course to help kaimahi with professional development and leadership opportunities

Areas of development:

- There has been an increase in admissions for mokopuna with very high and complex needs.
 - Kaimahi report feeling stretched beyond their capacity to care for mokopuna who have needs better suited, in their opinion, to bespoke placements with continuous one-to-one care.
 - These admissions were directed by Oranga Tamariki National Office and placement at Eponi extended beyond what was initially indicated to kaimahi working at the residence.

- Communication between Oranga Tamariki National Office and the Epuni residence leadership team was regular and solutions focused, however providing a consistently high standard of care for these very high and complex needs mokopuna was difficult for kaimahi to maintain, and created anxiety amongst the staffing group.
- Although positive progress has been made, more work is needed to continue building team cohesion, practice, and consistent communication amongst kaimahi.
- The grievance process requires urgent attention to ensure timely responses and that its use matches its intended purpose.

Recommendations

2026 Systemic and Oranga Tamariki National Office focused Recommendations

As a result of the findings of our OPCAT monitoring visit in March 2026, Mana Mokopuna makes the following recommendations:

	Recommendation
1	When Oranga Tamariki National Office direct admissions to Epuni, ensure kaimahi are adequately equipped to provide a high standard of care for mokopuna when they present with significant and complex support needs.
2	Progress a refurbishment of the Secure Care unit at Epuni. Secure care should be maintained regularly rather than waiting until conditions become unacceptable.
3	Continue working with Health New Zealand - Te Whatu Ora on the draft model of care and ensure an actionable model can be put in to practice.
4	Ensure all Oranga Tamariki site social workers adhere to the expected practice standards relating to their obligations for face-to-face mokopuna contact, detailed and up-to-date individual plans, and that transition planning is robust and communicated to mokopuna and whānau in a timely manner.

2026 Facility Recommendations for Epuni

	Recommendation
1	Ensure all kaimahi have the appropriate training to work with very high and complex needs mokopuna. This includes training in trauma-informed practice and mental health support basics to strengthen consistency and cohesion of practice across the residence. Where kaimahi practice gaps are identified, ensure refresher training is made available.

	Recommendation
2	Ensure kaimahi understand the Whaia te Maramatanga grievance process and how they can support mokopuna to use it correctly.
3	Assign a dedicated senior leader within Epuni to review and resolve the backlog of mokopuna grievances ensuring outcome letters are delivered to mokopuna in a timely manner.
4	Develop a plan with time-based milestones to embed culturally grounded practices that support stronger cultural connection and wellbeing outcomes for mokopuna Māori.
5	Continue working to improve the detail of information recorded in unit logbooks, the Secure Care register, and Use of Force reviews.
6	Ensure kaimahi are provided with the time and are encouraged to attend regular supervision, counselling, check-ins with their managers, or Rongoā Māori sessions to encourage practice review and support personal wellbeing.

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 Observations² for New Zealand's sixth periodic review on its implementation of the Children's Convention³ 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 Observations⁴ for New Zealand's seventh periodic review regarding the implementation of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment⁵.

Many of the recommendations from both sets of Concluding Observations are directly relevant to aspects of treatment experienced by mokopuna at Epuni. 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.

² Refer [CRC/C/NZL/CO/6 G2302344 \(3\).pdf](#)

³ [Convention on the Rights of the Child | OHCHR](#)

⁴ Refer [CAT/C/NZL/CO/7 G2315464.pdf](#)

⁵ [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment | OHCHR](#)

Detailed key findings

A stable leadership team has positive effects on mokopuna care

Since our last March 2025 full OPCAT Monitoring visit, a Permanent Residence manager has been confirmed, and this same person has now been leading the residence for close to two years. There has been a clear intention set by the Residence Manager that the leadership team need to invest in themselves and commit to a vision for the residence with short-, medium- and long-term goals. The leadership team shared their team action plan with the OPCAT Monitoring team that outlined positive changes from recruitment and the ability to fill vacancies, to training focus areas, establishing team building days, investing in kaimahi ora (wellbeing) and building relationships with mana whenua (Te Ati Awa the local iwi). All these factors contribute positively to the care experienced by mokopuna whilst living at Epuni.

Generally, kaimahi described their leadership team as more inclusive and supportive, with improved communication and providing kaimahi with greater opportunities for feedback around what is working well for them and what needs to be improved. One kaimahi noted that the leadership team had helped *“pull us together as a team and now we are rowing on the same waka,”* reflecting a stronger sense of cohesion and shared direction for kaimahi working to support mokopuna living at the residence. Mokopuna said they knew the Residence Manager as they would often spend time in the units and kaimahi said that Oranga Tamariki National Office kaimahi were also spending time at Epuni to better understand the environment and provide real time feedback to those working directly with mokopuna. Kaimahi who commit to a shared strategic direction with positive practice goals helps to keep care consistent for mokopuna and reduces the likelihood of harm occurring, as expectations and processes are clear regarding accountability.

Compared to our last March 2025 OPCAT Monitoring visit, observations and interviews with a range of kaimahi during this March 2026 visit indicated the culture of the residence had improved and kaimahi were more confident in how leaders were managing day-to-day operations. Mokopuna also felt they had trusted adults they could speak with and that they had a voice in their care and in the activities they could participate in.

Staffing numbers have improved

In addition to a stable leadership group, the kaimahi group available to work directly with mokopuna has grown. Recent recruitment drives have added eleven kaimahi to the staffing pool. Of note, the number of kaimahi who are qualified social workers has increased and these kaimahi were working directly with mokopuna, enabling a more clinical approach to everyday mokopuna care and treatment.

Additional investment has also been made in workforce development. Kaimahi described opportunities to participate in first aid, water safety, and crisis response training, while

leadership development initiatives included Team Leader Operations (TLO) training, Oranga Tamariki leadership programmes and Epuni internally developed '*Emerging Leaders*' and '*Shift Leader Development Training*' programmes. These initiatives were viewed positively by the kaimahi Mana Mokopuna spoke with, as they said the investment reflected a commitment to strengthening workforce capability and leadership pathways within the residence.

However, a significant proportion of kaimahi are still relatively new, with some having limited experience working in complex care environments. Some kaimahi described feeling unprepared to respond to complex or high-risk situations, including incidents involving violence and self-harm. This suggests that training, supervision, and coaching is not adequately equipping kaimahi with the tools to provide mokopuna with high quality care at all times. Varying levels of kaimahi experience may also affect consistency in practice and the quality of care experienced by mokopuna. For example, some kaimahi described times when they felt shift teams operated in silos with differing expectations about how practice should be applied from their TLOs. Mana Mokopuna recommends further training for all kaimahi on trauma-informed practice, working with very high and complex needs mokopuna, and mental health support basics, to strengthen consistency and cohesion of practice across the residence.

Supervision and wellbeing supports were available to kaimahi, including EAP⁶ and Rongoā Māori. Despite the availability of these supports, creating the time and conditions for reflective practice and wellbeing support remains a challenge for some kaimahi. Some kaimahi during this March 2026 OPCAT Monitoring visit reported that supervision (in the various forms offered) was inconsistent and for some did not meet their personal practice needs, especially given the complexity of the mahi kaimahi are involved in working at Epuni.

Overall, while there is evidence of improvement and on-going efforts to strengthen workforce capability, variability in workforce experience and day-to-day practice may continue to affect the consistency of care and support experienced by mokopuna.

Mokopuna are comfortable making suggestions to positively impact their care

Whilst most mokopuna the OPCAT Monitoring team spoke with said they would prefer not to be in residence, these same mokopuna said they have adults they could talk to, express how they feel and voice their opinions to. Mokopuna were encouraged to provide feedback to kaimahi about things they had done that mokopuna liked and positively impacted their time in the residence. For example, mokopuna had the opportunity to nominate kaimahi for residence awards and if they wanted to, could give a speech as to why they nominated those kaimahi at a ceremony held on-site at the residence.

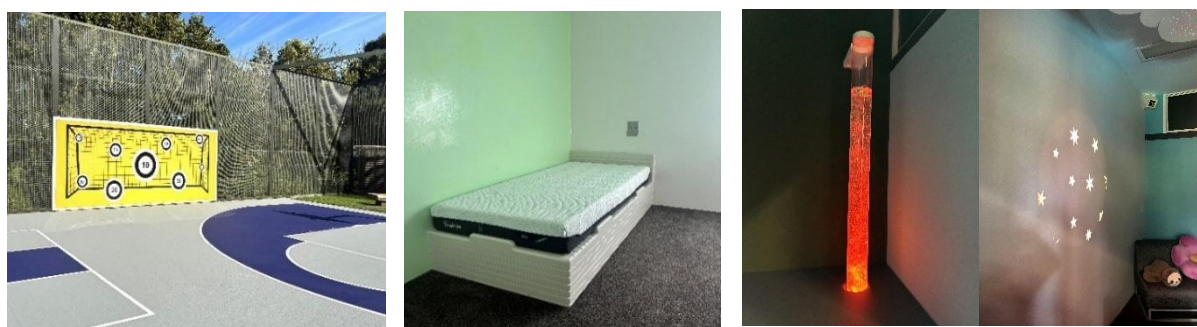
Mokopuna All About Me Plans had clear sections on mokopuna health, education, and sensory needs that provided guidance for kaimahi on their triggers and how they can be supported with emotional regulation. Mokopuna voice was also present in their plans including

⁶ [1686867620_eap-collateral-what-is-eap-final.pdf](#)

information on their strengths, interests, and what matters to them such as activities, aspirations, and what helps them feel safe.

The OPCAT Monitoring team also saw good evidence of mokopuna setting goals with kaimahi. Mokopuna goals were displayed on the unit wall which aligned with what was documented in their All About Me Plans. Mokopuna received rewards after achieving these goals which was based around their behaviour and positive engagement. Goals would be adjusted if mokopuna did not achieve them initially and kaimahi said they continue to work with mokopuna to support their progress. Many mokopuna also explained they were able to provide feedback and suggestions to kaimahi on what activities they wanted to do and resources they wanted purchased. For example, mokopuna had new memory foam mattresses after they had made the suggestion through the grievance process to upgrade their beds for additional comfortability and a better night's sleep.

Implementing mokopuna ideas, celebrating their achievements, and giving mokopuna a voice in decisions is essential to promoting their wellbeing and is their right under article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the rights of a child.



(left) The newly painted outdoor area, (centre) new mokopuna mattresses, (right) sensory room lighting

Mokopuna knew how to raise concerns and use the grievance process

Mokopuna had access to independent advocacy through VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai and Kaiwhakamana⁷ visited mokopuna in the residence weekly. Mokopuna were engaging with VOYCE and Kaiwhakamana indicated concerns were escalated and responded to appropriately by the residence leadership team. Epuni kaimahi with the support of Oranga Tamariki National Office kaimahi had also developed a child-friendly booklet outlining mokopuna rights and the grievance process, which reportedly was well received by mokopuna.

The grievance process was actively used by mokopuna; however, the volume of grievances appeared to affect the residence's ability to respond to concerns in a timely and meaningful way. The grievances used to be reviewed by the residence Quality Lead, however due to time constraints, the task has been delegated to the TLOs. Timely reviews continue to be a challenge and having a larger group oversee the grievances is leading to inconsistency in how the

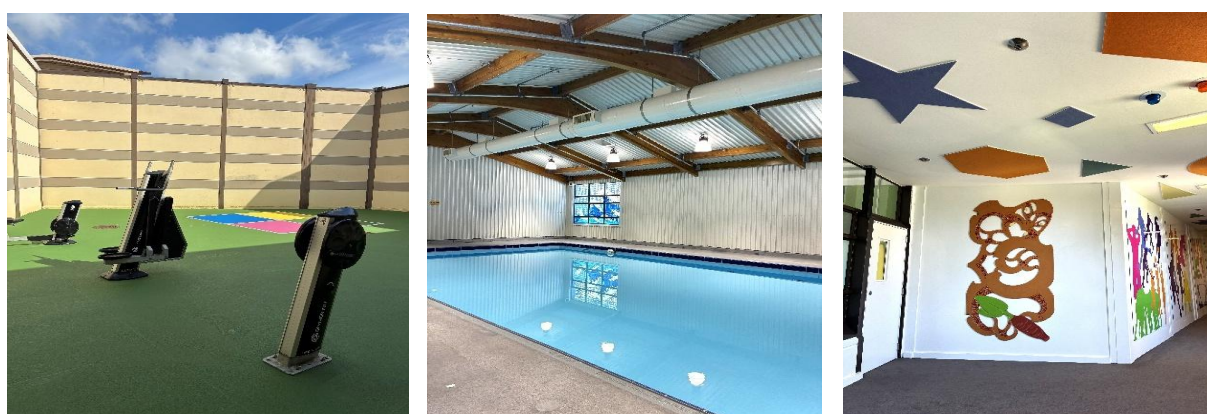
⁷ Advocates working for VOYCE Whakarongo Mai.

grievances are investigated and responded to. Despite this, some concerns were not always responded to within expected timeframes, with some grievances remaining unresolved for extended periods of time. The Residence Manager has identified the need to strengthen how concerns are managed and was exploring alternative approaches to support more timely responses and reduce the existing backlog. Mana Mokopuna recommends the residence assign a dedicated senior leader within Epuni to review and resolve the backlog of mokopuna grievances.

Overall, advocacy and complaint mechanisms were established and accessible within the residence. However, the effectiveness of these processes was influenced by response timeliness, workforce capacity, and the extent to which concerns were consistently managed and resolved. Timely and meaningful responses remain important to ensuring mokopuna rights, participation, and confidence in protection mechanisms is upheld.

Material conditions have improved for mokopuna

Material conditions within the residence have improved again since our last March 2025 visit, particularly in relation to infrastructure, resources for mokopuna, and mokopuna access to activities and on-site programmes.⁸ There is evidence of on-going efforts by Oranga Tamariki to create a more mokopuna-centric environment through investment in recreational resources like bikes, kayaks and sports equipment and more useable outdoor spaces for mokopuna. Of note was the completion of a sensory room for mokopuna wellbeing and emotional regulation (as per the OPCAT recommendation from the September 2024 visit), the courtyard has been refurbished with callisthenics gym equipment installed, and some internal areas have been painted with new artwork adding colour and interest to the walls of the units. Mokopuna were observed using the outdoor courtyard for the first time since its refurbishment and they all spoke positively about the improvements made while participating in a game of basketball.



(left) Secure care courtyard area, (centre) indoor pool, and (right) interior spaces within the residence.

⁸ ⁸ UNCROC Article 31 – Right to Play, Recreation and Cultural Participation - [UN Convention on Rights of a Child \(UNCRC\) - UNICEF UK](#)

Kaimahi are providing meaningful programmes built around mokopuna skills, strengths and interests

During this March 2026 OPCAT Monitoring visit, Mana Mokopuna heard directly from mokopuna and saw via documentation that mokopuna had access to a range of activities both within the residence and in the community. These included:

- Sport, fitness, swimming and hauora programmes.
- Community bike rides and access to outdoor parks and recreation areas.
- Adventure activities such as rock climbing and laser tag.
- Community outings, including beach trips, concerts, and marae visits.
- Art, music, and life-skills activities.

Mana Mokopuna observed mokopuna participating in a hauora (wellbeing) programme delivered by an external provider. The session included stretching, warm-up exercises, and circuit-based High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT). The fitness activities were tailored to the age and abilities of mokopuna with most mokopuna engaging at their own pace. Kaimahi, mokopuna, and facilitators were observed encouraging each other's participation in a supportive manner without applying pressure, contributing to a positive and inclusive environment for all. Kaimahi also told the Mana Mokopuna OPCAT Monitoring team of an example of a tamaiti being supported to attend the January 2026 Wellington Ed Sheeran concert in partnership with VOYCE Whakarongo Mai.⁹

Mana Mokopuna saw how kaimahi are being intentional in the programmes they set up and deliver for mokopuna. Kaimahi have a weekly budget of \$150 to design and deliver activities for mokopuna and programmes included learning about healthy relationships, community services, and other topics intended to support their independence and wellbeing. The internally developed '*Emerging Leaders*' and '*Shift Leader Development*' programmes are operational and have been designed to not only grow leadership capability for kaimahi professional development, but to also help to strengthen programme development and facilitation skills so that kaimahi feel confident leading and delivering programmes in the units for mokopuna.

Education continues to be a strength at Epuni

Education at Epuni is delivered with individualised support and tailored opportunities to promote mokopuna creativity and achievement. Education staff described access to dedicated teacher aide support, regular collaboration with Occupational Therapists and Speech and Language Therapists, as very positive and a key enabler to ensuring individual mokopuna educational needs and goals can be met. Mokopuna were observed participating in structured

⁹ [Home - VOYCE - WHAKARONGO MAI](#)

practical and interest-based learning activities, including cooking, sewing, photography, and music.

Improving outcomes for mokopuna Māori

There is evidence of on-going efforts to strengthen outcomes for mokopuna Māori through cultural roles such as the Kaiwhakaako and building relationships with iwi and community partners. The Kaiwhakaako role continually supports kaimahi and mokopuna to engage with mātauranga Māori and tikanga in their day-to-day life at Epuni. A new Kaiwhakaako had recently been hired and were keen to put into action many plans and aspirations for the residence including helping to strengthen mokopuna connection to their identity, support engagement with te ao Māori, te reo Māori, and tikanga and create opportunities for whakawhānaungatanga and positive connections with others through activities and offsite experiences in the community.



Mahi toi displayed within the residence unit.

Partnerships with mana whenua are continuing to develop. Mana whenua has been involved in recruitment processes and working with kaimahi to deliver cultural activities. Examples include partnering with Mana Whenua to bless the new sensory room, refurbished pool, and supporting local marae-based engagement opportunities for mokopuna. These relationships support the integration of cultural knowledge and perspectives and provide opportunities for mokopuna Māori to engage with aspects of their culture, identity and tikanga, as is consistent with the protections afforded to Māori taonga under Article 2 of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

However, system-level constraints impact on the extent to which these partnerships and approaches can be fully realised for mokopuna. Mokopuna are often placed far away from home which may limit opportunities for engagement with their local iwi, community providers, whānau, and culturally responsive environments. Admissions into Epuni can be driven by broader system placement limitations, which has a particular impact for mokopuna Māori who are placed away from whānau, whenua, and established cultural connections.

Mokopuna have a right to be in environments that meet their cultural and developmental needs as per Article 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the

Child. This is also consistent with the care and protection principles set out in sections 5 and 13 of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989. These principles emphasise the importance of maintaining and strengthening connections to whānau, hapū, iwi culture, language and identity.

Overall, while progress at Epuni is evident and promising, further work is required to consistently embed culturally grounded practice and ensure system settings support stronger cultural connection and wellbeing outcomes for mokopuna Māori.

Secure Care use has been trending down since October 2025

The isolation and seclusion of mokopuna goes against their human rights. The UN Committee Against Torture, the UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture and the UN 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. There is strong international advocacy for the seclusion of all mokopuna in all settings to cease immediately. The Concluding Observations on New Zealand released by the UN Committee Against Torture on 26 July 2023 recommend New Zealand should immediately end the practice of solitary confinement for children in detention. Mana Mokopuna supports zero seclusion practices. We have seen that this is achievable as demonstrated by some of the other places of deprivation of liberty of mokopuna that we monitor as an OPCAT National Preventative Mechanism.

There was evidence through a review of documentation during this March 2026 visit that kaimahi at Epuni were using Secure Care less in comparison to data reviewed for the April 2024 and March 2025 OPCAT Monitoring visits. Those past OPCAT Monitoring visits noted a concerning trend in use of secure care in the facility, especially when mokopuna with high and complex needs were living in the residence. Kaimahi were clear on this March 2026 visit that there is an increased focus on them building relationships and positive rapport with mokopuna, using verbal de-escalation, and utilising alternative engagement-based responses before considering a Secure Care admission. Kaimahi described efforts to “*talk mokopuna down*” prior to using a Secure Care admission and highlighted the importance of whakawhānaungatanga in supporting mokopuna emotional regulation, to help reduce the need for restrictive responses.

Mana Mokopuna noted examples such as supporting mokopuna emotional regulation through activities, increased community-based experiences, and the use of designated de-escalation spaces within the units, including the sensory room, hallway corridors or outside courtyards so that mokopuna could self-soothe or regulate away from the group.

When Secure Care was used, mokopuna were generally admitted for short periods of time. An area Mana Mokopuna would like to see improvement is in clearly articulating the rationale and grounds for the Secure Care admission in the dedicated registers and logbooks and

producing detailed plans for reintegrating mokopuna back into the unit after the Secure Care admission.

Improvements to use of force documentation are needed to prevent harm

Use of force reviews were analysed for events that occurred between October 2025 – February 2026. Our analysis showed reviews were occurring regularly within a timely manner, which is an improvement from previous visits. However, further improvements can be made by attaching the incident form to the review so that the end-to-end process, including the force event, can be reviewed in its entirety in order to target kaimahi training and practice reflection. Just stating whether a use of force technique used on mokopuna met CPI¹⁰ standards is not useful for kaimahi and Mana Mokopuna has seen better examples of how force and restraint holds on mokopuna are documented and reviewed with useful commentary regarding future practice on the Use of Force review form. This may help to identify where restrictive practices were used as an absolute last resort or where other interventions could have effectively de-escalated mokopuna behaviours to avoid force altogether.

Mana Mokopuna encourages Oranga Tamariki to review all Use of Force documentation across all residences (both Care and Protection and Youth Justice) to see where improvements can be made and how practice can be more consistent across the residence network.

The Concluding Observations released by the United Nations Committee Against Torture on 26 July 2023 say that States Parties should explicitly prohibit the use of force, including physical restraints against children in care.¹¹

Co-ordinated planning is important for mokopuna care

Kaimahi at Epuni provide good support to mokopuna when they arrive at the facility. They recognise that admissions into new placements are stressful for mokopuna and kaimahi do their best to provide as smooth a process as possible when mokopuna arrive. The residence has a child-friendly admission booklet that mokopuna can use and refer back to when they have settled into their new space. However, factors outside of the control of Epuni kaimahi can negatively impact how mokopuna settle into the residence. As part of our OPCAT Monitoring across all designations, the Mana Mokopuna Monitoring team hear that Oranga Tamariki site social workers have variable engagement with mokopuna on their caseloads and, despite Oranga Tamariki practice guidance,¹² many mokopuna tell us that they are often not visited or do not always feel well informed by their allocated social workers. One tamaiti during this March 2026 visit to Epuni, said they were not told about being placed at Epuni prior to their

¹⁰ [Crisis Prevention Institute \(CPI\) | CPI Training | New Zealand](#). This is the training used in all Care and Protection residences and the Standard to which kaimahi are assessed when using force on mokopuna.

¹¹ CAT/C/NZL/CO/7 para 38(g)

¹² [See and engage tamariki | Practice Centre | Oranga Tamariki](#)

arrival at the residence. Mokopuna have a right to be informed about decisions affecting them, including where they will be living and receiving care.¹³ When placements and decisions are not communicated in advance, this can negatively impact mokopuna trust in adults and their emotional safety before the placement has even begun.

Planning to leave secure residential care is also important for mokopuna, and communication needs to be consistent so that mokopuna understand what is next for them regarding a safe and stable placement. Mana Mokopuna found that transition pathways are not always identified or communicated to mokopuna in a timely manner by their allocated Oranga Tamariki Social Workers, which contributes to feelings of uncertainty and anxiety for mokopuna on where they are going next. For example, some mokopuna who spoke with the OPCAT monitoring team during this March 2026 OPCAT Monitoring visit, were nearing their proposed end date for their stay at Epuni and said they did not have clearly defined exit pathways or confirmed long-term supports. This suggests that long-term outcomes and continuity of care are not consistently prioritised in transition planning and Oranga Tamariki site social workers need to do better when planning mokopuna exits from secure residences. Planning mokopuna transitions out of a secure residence needs to start at the point mokopuna are admitted. Kaimahi explained that they see increased incidents of mokopuna frustration, disengagement, and anxiety, particularly when transitions are not well planned or when relocation involved separation from whānau or familiar environments.

Overall, while Epuni kaimahi worked to support admissions and facilitate positive transitions, the experience of mokopuna remained heavily influenced by factors outside the direct control of the residence. Variability in admission planning, social worker engagement, transition planning, and interagency coordination contributed to uncertainty for some mokopuna and negatively impacted their care experience.

Social workers are required to provide appropriate transition supports and ensure a positive care transition experience for mokopuna under regulation 74 of the Oranga Tamariki (National Care Standards and Related Matters) Regulations 2018.¹⁴ This includes providing information on their placements prior to their transition date and providing sufficient monitoring and support during their care transition.

Supporting mokopuna with very high and complex needs is a challenge for kaimahi

The very high and complex needs, including significant mental health support needs, of mokopuna within the residence remains a significant challenge for kaimahi. While kaimahi continue to respond to these needs as best they can with the training provided to them, many

¹³ Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

¹⁴ 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](#)

kaimahi expressed that the residence is not designed as a specialist facility and they are struggling to meet the needs of some mokopuna who are being admitted. This reflects broader system pressures relating to placement options and access to appropriate specialist, often bespoke, supports for mokopuna. As outlined at the beginning of this report, kaimahi are feeling under prepared and under pressure when they are directed to take very complex admissions by Oranga Tamariki National Office.

Mokopuna at Epuni do have access to medical and mental health services within the residence, including on-site nursing care, general practitioners, clinical support, and externally contracted specialist services. On-site general nursing care is provided through VIBE¹⁵ and these kaimahi demonstrate excellent flexibility in responding to the needs of mokopuna, including support with medication management, responding to emerging health concerns, and providing support to kaimahi outside of standard business hours. Health New Zealand - Te Whatu Ora also have two full-time equivalent roles allocated to support mokopuna with mental health needs and the kaimahi working with them at Epuni. These localised initiatives include weekly coaching for kaimahi by Infant, Child, Adolescent and Family Services (ICAFS) on trauma-informed relational care, fortnightly clinical meetings focused on individual tamaiti and clinicians actively on-site on a regular basis to provide in-real-time guidance.

In addition to this, work continues to progress to implement a more therapeutic approach at Epuni via shared input from Oranga Tamariki and Health New Zealand – Te Whatu Ora. Health New Zealand – Te Whatu Ora received funding to develop a clinical model of care for the residence and work is on-going as to what this could look like if implemented into every-day practice at Epuni. Mana Mokopuna encourages these two agencies to continue to work together for a more targeted approach to holistic, therapeutic care for mokopuna at Epuni, especially for mokopuna with very high and complex support needs.

¹⁵ [Vibe](#)

Appendix One

Progress on 2025 Recommendations

The below table provides an assessment of OPCAT Monitoring recommendations made in the previous June 2025 OPCAT monitoring report for Epuni. Mana Mokopuna acknowledges that work on systemic recommendations is being led at an Oranga Tamariki National Office level. The progress detailed here only relates to- the day-to-day operations of this particular facility that were reported, observed or evidenced during the visit and are assessed to have made **good**, **limited**, **some**, or **no** progress:

2025 Systemic Recommendations for Oranga Tamariki

	2025 Recommendation	Progress as of March 2026
1	Urgently implement the Team Leader Operations (TLO) training that has been promised and outlined in OPCAT monitoring reports in 2024.	Complete (in terms of the specific training promised to TLOs outlined in the previous March 2025 visit) Training and leadership initiatives are now occurring and there is evidence of improvement in terms of practice. However, kaimahi are still reporting consistency issues when it comes to TLO direction for practice implementation and that some shift teams operate differently to others. This is also a concern given the influx of newer kaimahi and those with less experience working with very high and complex mokopuna, that the knowledge base will shrink without continued training and refreshers to iron-out inconsistencies in practice approaches.
2	Ensure social workers are developing transition plans for mokopuna early, with comprehensive wrap-around supports for mokopuna and whānau. to ensure mokopuna do not remain in secure residences longer than necessary.	Some Progress - There is evidence of an increased focus on transition planning and multi-agency coordination since the previous March 2025 visit, including engagement between social workers, clinical providers, education staff, and residence kaimahi. However, transition planning remains variable in terms of quality, with some mokopuna experiencing delays in confirmed pathways and inconsistent coordination and communication of supports for mokopuna and whānau in their home community.
3	Review the staffing ratio need at Epuni to ensure there is adequate 1:1 support available for mokopuna with very high and complex needs.	Mana Mokopuna notes this 2025 recommendation was not accepted by Oranga Tamariki. Since the previous visit, the residence has undertaken recruitment and workforce development initiatives to strengthen staffing capacity, including increasing staffing levels and leadership support. Mokopuna are presenting with increasingly high and complex needs, some with significant needs (who are directed for placement in Epuni by Oranga Tamariki National Office) and kaimahi said they do not always have the capability to support these mokopuna appropriately. Mana Mokopuna continues to advocate for residences to regularly review their staffing ratios to ensure the right number of kaimahi are available to support mokopuna and provide a high-quality care experience.
4	Review the residence recruitment strategy to ensure all kaimahi have the adequate skills and experience to work appropriately with high and complex needs mokopuna.	Good Progress - Recruitment and workforce development initiatives were evident during the visit, including increased staffing, leadership development initiatives, and wellbeing supports for kaimahi. Mana Mokopuna notes a high proportion of kaimahi are new and have variable experience and confidence responding to mokopuna with high and complex needs in the residence. This will be a target area for the next OPCAT Monitoring visit.
5	Ensure social workers adhere to their practice responsibilities ¹⁶ for mokopuna and minimum contact visits as per Oranga Tamariki Policy. ¹⁷	Limited progress - There was evidence of social worker involvement in some planning and coordination processes during the visit, including engagement with residence kaimahi and external providers. However, social worker engagement and coordination remained inconsistent for mokopuna, and regular social worker visits were not always experienced by all mokopuna.

¹⁶ [Allocating a key worker and co-worker | Practice Centre | Oranga Tamariki](#)

¹⁷ [Visiting and engaging with tamariki and rangatahi in care | Practice Centre | Oranga Tamariki](#)

2025 Recommendations for Epuni Care and Protection Residence

	2025 Recommendation	Progress as of March 2026
1	Urgently refurbish the secure care unit.	Some progress – The outdoor area of secure care had been decorated and made more modern and work was soon to occur on replacing the Perspex between the bathrooms and bedrooms. In general. Secure Care needed a refresh and kaimahi told Mana Mokopuna there was no immediate plans to do this apart from refurbishing a bedroom damaged by mokopuna lighting a fire. It was disappointing to see the mattresses in Secure Care bedrooms were not upgraded with the rest of the residence bedrooms.
2	Ensure kaimahi receive regular training on SOPs and specialised training in mental health, neurodiversity, and trauma-informed practice.	Some progress - Whilst Oranga Tamariki note this recommendation is complete, we have assessed it as a need that is on-going. Training and workforce development initiatives were evident during the visit. However, kaimahi continued to say they felt under-prepared when responding to complex mental health and high-risk situations, indicating a need for on-going refresher training and further capability development. As previously noted, there are many new and inexperienced kaimahi and given the recent Oranga Tamariki National Office directed referrals for admission, Mana Mokopuna recommends additional training to ensure mokopuna needs can be met at all times.
3	Implement a schedule of meaningful, culturally inclusive programmes outside the structured school day.	Good Progress - Increased access to meaningful activities and programmes outside the structured school day was evident during this March 2026 visit. Mokopuna were participating in a range of recreational, cultural, hauora-based, and offsite activities, supported by increased programme resources and dedicated activity spaces within the residence
4	Ensure all kaimahi have access to regular, external professional supervision.	Mana Mokopuna notes this 2025 recommendation was not accepted by Oranga Tamariki. Supervision was available to kaimahi who required it as part of their professional registration requirements. Kaimahi were able to check-in with their TLOs or peers, EAP was available and post-incident debriefs were occurring. The ability for kaimahi to have access to skilled supervision facilitators is important for consistency of mokopuna care and for kaimahi to reflect on practice decisions and outcomes. Mana Mokopuna continues to advocate for all kaimahi working with mokopuna who have high and complex support needs to have access to quality supervision. Kaimahi during this March 2026 OPCAT Monitoring visit reported that supervision (in the various forms offered) was inconsistent and for some kaimahi, it did not meet their personal practice needs.
5	Invest in support for kaimahi to build cultural competency in tikanga, te reo and mātauranga Māori to better support mokopuna Māori.	Some progress - A new Kaiwhakaako had been recruited and partnerships with mana whenua continue to develop. Work is underway to strengthen kaimahi understanding of tikanga, te reo Māori and mātauranga Māori. Further work is required to embed cultural capability across the workforce at Epuni, which will be another key focus area during the next OPCAT monitoring visit.

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 and kaimahi.	
Interviews and informal discussions with kaimahi and external stakeholders	■ Mokopuna ■ Residence Manager ■ Case Leaders ■ Kaiwhakaako ■ Residential Youth Workers ■ Team Leader Support Services ■ Team Leader Operations ■ Team Leader Clinical Practice ■ Manager Residence Operations ■ Manager Residential Services ■ Program- Coordinator ■ Vibe Health ■ Quality Lead ■ Grievance Panel Chair ■ Shift Leaders ■ Administration kaimahi ■ Property team ■ ICAFS Te Whatu Ora ■ VOICE Whakarongo Mai ■ Central Regional School ■ Programme Coordinator
Documentation	■ All About Me Plans ■ Admission Booklet ■ Epuni Action Plans ■ Use of Force Reviews ■ Grievance Quarterly Reports including Individual grievances ■ Serious Event Notifications ■ Epuni Monthly Quality Report Summaries ■ Kaimahi Roster ■ Mokopuna Admission List ■ Mokopuna Daily Routine ■ Report of Concerns ■ Epuni Daily Unit Logs ■ Off-site Risk Assessments ■ Secure Care Logs

	■ Incident Reports ■ Searches Register ■ Mokopuna Celebratory Reports – Education
Observations and engagements with mokopuna	■ Unit routines, activities and mealtimes – observing mokopuna engagement with each other and with kaimahi. ■ Education in the classroom ■ Secure Care ■ Shift handovers ■ Morning, afternoon, and evening shifts