

29 August 2024

Dr Claire Achmad
Chief Children's Commissioner
Mana Mokopuna | Children and Young People's Commission
Sent via email: [REDACTED]

Tēnā koe Dr Achmad

Draft OPCAT Report – Epuni Care and Protection Residence

In April 2024, your monitoring team visited the Epuni Care and Protection Residence (Epuni) to monitor the safety and wellbeing of tamariki and rangatahi. This monitoring visit was completed as part of your role as a National Preventive Mechanism under the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT).

On 17 July 2024, you provided your draft OPCAT report for Epuni to Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki) for review and comment. Our response to the factual accuracy was shared with your office on 1 August 2024.

Oranga Tamariki have accepted all 12 recommendations. As you will be aware, in the immediate weeks following your visit we actioned your recommendation to develop an action plan for Epuni. Focus areas of this include lifting leadership capability, strengthening practice and training, intensive recruitment, building and maintaining effective key stakeholder relationships and improving infrastructure. We provided this action plan to your office on 24 May 2024.

I acknowledge the concerns raised in the report regarding a lack of consistent leadership and a poor workplace culture. As noted in our response, this is something that was identified in the weeks prior to the monitoring visit, and which we looked to address by invoking an interim leadership change. An acting Residence Manager was introduced on 2 April 2024 with a mandate to implement the necessary changes to ensure the safe, effective, and efficient operation of Epuni. We note that your monitors observed that this change appeared to be making inroads, and that kaimahi interviewed were optimistic about the upcoming changes. We will continue to keep working with your office as to the progress of the plan.

It was pleasing to note your findings that whānau contact is prioritised, with the acknowledgement that Epuni managers go out of their way to support whānau visiting their tamariki and rangatahi. When staying at Epuni, tamariki and rangatahi are able to make regular phone calls and video calls to whānau as well as receiving regular visits face-to-face. Whānau visits can take place at the facility or tamariki and rangatahi are able to go off-site with whānau to spend quality time together regularly. External

residence professionals and whānau also shared that the Epuni case leader team is supportive and maintain regular communication, providing updates and progress of tamariki and rangatahi whilst at Epuni.

Like your monitoring team, we are conscious that the current version of Epuni is on the site of the original Epuni home. We acknowledge the impact that intergenerational trauma has had on both kaimahi Māori working at the facility, and whānau visiting their tamariki and rangatahi currently residing there (especially those who resided for a time at Epuni). We recognise that whānau who have experienced distress while previously at Epuni may have little confidence that things have progressed since their time in residence. However, I am confident that the majority of tamariki and rangatahi are much better served now, while also acknowledging there is still much mahi needed to improve the experience of all tamariki and rangatahi in our care.

I trust you find this information useful. If you have any questions or would like further information, please contact me on [REDACTED]

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a trailing line, positioned below the Māori phrase.

Julie Miller

**General Manager External Monitoring and Reviews
System Leadership**