



1 May 2023

Judge Frances Eivers
Children's Commissioner
Office of the Children's Commissioner
PO Box 5610
Wellington 6145

Sent via email: [REDACTED]

Tēnā koe Judge Eivers

Draft OPCAT Report – Epuni Care and Protection Residence

In January 2023, your monitoring team visited Epuni Care and Protection Residence 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), and was a follow-up visit to the full visit completed in May 2022.

On 20 March 2023, you provided your draft OPCAT report for Epuni for our review and comment. On 6 April 2023, we provided our feedback on the factual accuracy of the draft report.

Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki) previously accepted the nine recommendations made in your May 2022 report. Please find enclosed our updated responses to these recommendations following your follow-up visit.

We are pleased that your report identified several positive findings since your last visit. This included a number of permanent appointments occurring which contributed to a positive shift in practice, culture and the overall wellbeing of staff. It was also good to hear that you observed positive interactions between staff and leadership; that there are regular offsite activities for mokopuna, and they help decide what these activities are; and that mokopuna spoke of having regular contact with their whānau.

We acknowledge the areas your report identifies that require further work, such as staff training and development in relation to working with heightened situations

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involving mokopuna; staff undertaking full induction training; gaps in care planning; and ensuring cultural safety at Epuni.

We also acknowledge your concern with increasing bed capacity at Epuni. As noted by our Chief Executive in our response to your 18 November 2022 letter (appended), this decision was not made lightly. This was necessary to ensure Oranga Tamariki can provide a safe, short-term intervention for an increasing number of tamariki aged 13 years and under who are driving cars and participating in other offending-type behaviours in the community that significantly places them, and those around them, at risk of serious harm. We have achieved this by opening a second unit, dividing tamariki into two smaller groups.

We are continuing to actively review bed capacity at Epuni, and it is intended that capacity will be reduced once the current increase detailed above subsides. I want to assure you that Oranga Tamariki remains committed to our long-term plan of reducing our reliance on care and protection residences by ensuring there are a range of suitable care options within each community. In the meantime, we continue to carefully assess the need for admission to a residence based on each child's unique circumstances, supporting this only as a last resort when all other care options in the community have been exhausted.

Addressing your report findings and recommendations is a priority. Early in 2023 we established a Care Residences Governance Group to support Epuni and all Care and Protection Residences to deliver key strategic priorities and actions resulting from recommendations made in your reports and from other external oversight agencies. The Governance Group, which comprises of senior Oranga Tamariki staff, maintains collective responsibility and accountability for strengthening Care and Protection Residences and working towards our Future Direction Plan.

As our report back demonstrates, there is considerable ongoing work underway in Epuni and all Oranga Tamariki Residences generally, which will strengthen the areas your report identified. We look forward to continuing to share updates with you and your team as this work progresses.

I trust you find this information useful. If you have any questions or would like further information, please feel free to contact me on 029 200 5086, or alternatively Julie Miller, General Manager Monitoring and External Relationships on 027 257 2492.

Nāku noa, nā



Nicolette Dickson
Tumu Tuarua | Te Kōunga o te Mahi me ngā Wheako
Deputy Chief Executive | Quality Practice & Experiences

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