

OT-OIA-2026-0229

24 August 2026

s9(2)(a)

Tēnā koe

Thank you for your email, received on 27 July 2026, to Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki) requesting information concerning kaimahi safety at Te Puna Wai ō Tuhinapo (Te Puna Wai) Youth Justice Residence in Christchurch. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act).

The safety and wellbeing of rangatahi and kaimahi (staff) in youth justice residences is a priority for Oranga Tamariki. However, rangatahi in these facilities often have complex needs and high-risk behaviours.

Managing these dynamics while supporting the rangatahi is part of the operational challenge in our residences and kaimahi receive training specifically for these environments.

I have responded to each part of your request below.

1. *How many assaults and attempted assaults against staff have been recorded at Te Puna Wai during the past 12 months?*

In the past 12 months (1 August 2025 to 31 July 2026) there were 18 incidents recorded as involving alleged assaults against kaimahi at Te Puna Wai. Of these, 6 caused injury to kaimahi and 12 did not (note that any physical contact may be recorded as an assault, the term does not differentiate between levels of severity).

In addition, there were 39 instances where kaimahi were assaulted while attempting to restrain a young person. 13 of these incidents caused injury to kaimahi. Note that the Oranga Tamariki (Residential Care) Regulations 1996 allow for use of physical force in managing behaviours when there are reasonable grounds to believe that it is necessary.

There were 32 attempted assaults against kaimahi.

Please note that this is operational data, which is correct at the time of provision but subject to change.

2. *What is the required staff-to-young-person ratio at the residence, and how often during the past 12 months has Te Puna Wai operated below that level?*

There is no mandatory kaimahi to rangatahi ratio at Te Puna Wai. Kaimahi to rangatahi ratios at youth justice residences are determined by the operational needs of each residence and can change depending on the needs of a given cohort, and the support needs of individual rangatahi.

As such, this part of your request is refused under section 18(e) of the Act that the document alleged to contain the information requested does not exist or, despite reasonable efforts to locate it, cannot be found.

3. *Can young people open their bedroom doors from inside and leave their rooms without staff assistance? If so, what safeguards protect staff and other residents?*

Yes, rangatahi can open their bedroom doors from inside and leave their rooms without kaimahi assistance. During the day, rangatahi spend time with each other and kaimahi in different parts of the residence, including social activities such as meals or sport. When rangatahi are in their bedrooms overnight, kaimahi are on duty in the units. Rangatahi can use a call bell in their room for attention or can come out of their rooms and speak to kaimahi if they need to, as they would during the day.

Youth Justice Residences operate within specific legislation and are different from adult correctional facilities, where inmates may spend most of the time in cells.

As part of the Oranga Tamariki (Residential Care) Regulations 1996, young people cannot be locked in any room (with specific exceptions for secure care units).

4. *What support-including medical, psychological and employment support-is provided to staff following assaults?*

If a kaimahi is assaulted, the support provided will be dependent on the nature of the incident. If needed, first aid will be provided onsite, or the kaimahi may be assisted to receive offsite medical attention. If medical treatment and/or time off work is required, kaimahi receive support including financial, social and return to work support, managed by our third-party provider for injury management. Psychological support will also be offered if appropriate.

All kaimahi have access to our employee assistance programme (EAP) if required. Through this, they can access free and confidential counselling, and Rongoā Māori support.

Depending on the severity and impact of an incident, onsite critical incident support may also be arranged. This is delivered by a qualified practitioner as part of our EAP and may involve support being provided for kaimahi in groups or one to one.

I am also seeking responses to the following allegations:

- *Physical assaults and fights are frequent and have become normalised within the residence.*
- *Management has downplayed assaults and has not adequately supported affected staff.*
- *The residence regularly relies on overtime, staff working on rostered days off, and casual employees to maintain safe staffing.*
- *A recent unauthorised departure was described internally as a young person being “off site,” with no apparent consequences upon their return.*
- *Vapes have repeatedly been brought into the residence, and staff may be unable to confiscate them immediately.*
- *Staff morale is extremely low, with concerns raised about management conduct, the treatment of employees, and the handling of sick leave.*

Oranga Tamariki has interpreted this part of your request as seeking comment on the allegations you have raised, rather than a specific request for information as allowed for under the Act.

Oranga Tamariki has channels where kaimahi can raise concerns or comments, including via managers, our residences Health, Safety, Security and Wellbeing Forum, staff surveys and employment or complaints processes, in addition to speaking to union representatives if kaimahi are union members.

Senior leadership listens and responds to feedback and will take appropriate action where required.

I also seek clarification regarding the Behaviour Management System:

Please note the Behaviour Management System (BMS) is used to support rangatahi to make good choices. Versions of a BMS are used across the Youth Justice residential network. They are designed to be simple to use and understand.

The use of behavioural management programmes in residences is regulated under the Oranga Tamariki (Residential Care) Regulations 1996, and any programmes must comply with the National Code of Practice.

This response provides information about the present version of BMS at Te Puna Wai, however, please also note that the system is currently being updated.

1. What conduct is required to reach Level 3?

The BMS provides points to rangatahi for positive behaviours such as:

- participation
- interactions with others
- achieving goals that have been set
- personal appearance (e.g. tidying rooms, cleaning clothes).

However, points are removed for negative behaviours such as:

- breaking rules
- causing harm to others, including threatening gestures or language
- intentional damage or tampering with property.

Displaying positive or negative behaviours is described as 'Earning opportunities' or 'Limiting opportunities'. There is a daily scoring system, based on staff observations of the efforts that rangatahi have put towards each type of behaviour. Daily scores then allow the rangatahi to earn 'levels', up to Level 3. Points must be sustained to remain at Level 3.

2. *What food, recreational activities, off-site visits, credits, money or other benefits can young people receive?*

Potential rewards and privileges for rangatahi include:

- a later bedtime
- access to media (e.g. television privileges)
- a supervised outing for a leisure activity
- extra use of exercise facilities (e.g. basketball court or weights area)
- opportunities to socialise between units (e.g. a shared lunch with other Level 3s)
- leadership opportunities – responsibility for being the Youth Council representative (this is a forum where rangatahi can share feedback, complaints and suggestions).

3. *How much can a young person receive in credits each week, and what can those credits purchase?*

Rangatahi can earn credits dependant on their level each day. They can then spend these credits in the BMS 'store' to purchase snacks, or small items like toiletries or socks.

- rangatahi on Level 1 receive 0 credits
- rangatahi on Level 2 receive 1 credit per day
- rangatahi on Level 3 receive 2 credits per day.

4. *What risk assessments apply to weight-training activities?*

Staff who supervise rangatahi during weight-lifting must have a relevant qualification, for example in sports science or exercise. Use of the gym at Te Puna Wai is subject to the residence's standard activity risk-assessment and safety checks are conducted on the equipment before and after use.

5. *What is the therapeutic or behavioural rationale for these incentives, and how are outcomes measured?*

The BMS is used as a framework to support positive behaviour change. Rangatahi in residences have therapeutic interventions and programmes put in place to address their behavioural issues, criminogenic and health needs. The rationale of a BMS is that the model is part of a coordinated approach to ensure that these interventions and programmes can work effectively.

For example, rangatahi may set a goal for themselves to interact calmly and positively with other rangatahi. The BMS provides rapid recognition of their efforts. Recognising and highlighting pro-social behaviours aims to increase their use by the rangatahi, while logical consequences (losing points) discourage inappropriate behaviours.

The BMS is used in conjunction with the care and support provided by staff (and other professionals in residences). Staff are trained in safe residential practice, including:

- effective communication
- de-escalation techniques
- pro-social modelling, and
- using 'teachable moments' to help rangatahi understand their triggers and coping mechanisms and encourage positive behaviours.

In addition to helping rangatahi prepare for a successful transition from the residences, displaying positive behaviours helps create a stable and structured environment in the residence, which benefits all rangatahi and kaimahi.

Oranga Tamariki may make the information contained in this letter available to the public by publishing this on our website with any personal details removed.

I trust you find this information useful. Should you have any concerns with this response, I would encourage you to raise them with Oranga Tamariki. Alternatively, you are advised of your right to also raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Information about this is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or by contacting them on 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā



Dean Winter
Deputy Chief Executive
Youth Justice Services and Residential Care