

OT-OIA-2026-0226

24 August 2026

s9(2)(a)
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Tēnā koe s9(2)(a)

Thank you for your email, received on 9 July 2026, to Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki) requesting information about the Will St Whare (the Whare). Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act).

The Will St Whare is operated by Ōtakou Health Limited. Oranga Tamariki received several Reports of Concern related to the care of rangatahi at the Whare. As a result, while these Reports of Concern were being investigated, Oranga Tamariki ceased placing tamariki and rangatahi at the Whare as a precautionary measure. No tamariki or rangatahi have been placed at the Whare since March 2025. During the investigation process, further Reports of Concern were received.

In December 2025, Te Kāhui Kahu initiated a review of Ōtakou Health Limited and subsequently suspended its accreditation. Following completion of that review process, the accreditation was reinstated in April 2026.

Following completion of the reports of concern investigation process, discussions commenced with Ōtakou Health Limited in October 2025 regarding a possible assessment under section 400 of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989. The section 400 assessment process was formally initiated in March 2026 and remains underway.

A section 400 assessment is a statutory process established under the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989. Its purpose is to assess compliance with legislative and care standard requirements and to inform any subsequent decisions that may be required. The assessment process remains ongoing, and no decisions have been made regarding the future operation of the Whare. Any decisions concerning future use, service delivery, or placements will be made only after the assessment has been completed and its findings have been appropriately considered.

IN-CONFIDENCE

The outcome of the section 400 assessment will help inform any future decisions regarding the operation of the Whare. The duration of the assessment process will depend on the matters identified and the work required to address those matters.

I have responded to each part of your request below.

1. *The anticipated timeframe for reopening, including:*
 - a. *Planned or expected reopening dates;*
 - b. *Key milestones leading up to reopening;*
 - c. *Any known factors that may influence or alter the reopening timeline.*

There is currently no planned re-opening date for the Whare while the section 400 assessment process is ongoing.

Accordingly, there are no confirmed milestones, reopening plans, or associated dependencies at this stage. This part of your request is therefore refused under section 18(g)(i) of the Act, as the information requested is not held by Oranga Tamariki, nor is it held by another department.

Any future decision regarding the operation of the Whare would need to be supported by assurance that it can operate as a safe placement option for rangatahi, that will support their wellbeing and consistently meet the relevant National Care Standards, as well as contractual shared care service specifications.

2. *The intended operating model for the facility, including:*
 - a. *The purpose and function of the facility upon reopening;*
 - b. *The number and profile of rangatahi expected to be accommodated;*
 - c. *The services, programmes, and supports that will be available;*
 - d. *Staffing arrangements and agency involvement;*
 - e. *How the facility will integrate with existing youth justice, care and protection, education, health, and community support services in the Southern region.*

The purpose, operating model, capacity, service offering, staffing arrangements, and relationships with other services would depend on the outcome of the ongoing assessment process.

As that process has not yet concluded, Oranga Tamariki is not in a position to confirm any of these matters. Accordingly, this part of your request is refused under section 18(g)(i) of the Act.

3. *Planning and collaboration with local stakeholders, including:*
 - a. *Engagement undertaken or planned with iwi, local service providers, community organisations, local government, and residents;*
 - b. *Opportunities for cross-sector collaboration to support positive outcomes for rangatahi;*
 - c. *Any assessments of potential community impacts associated with the reopening.*

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Any planning or engagement activities would be informed by the outcome of the ongoing assessment process. As there is currently no decision regarding the future operation of the Whare, no specific stakeholder engagement or community impact assessment relating to a possible reopening has been undertaken.

Accordingly, this part of your request is refused under section 18(g)(i) of the Act.

4. *Supporting documentation, including any reports, business cases, decision papers, or other documents relating to the reopening of Will Street whare that may be released under the Act.*

Information relating to the ongoing section 400 assessment process forms part of advice, analysis, and discussions being considered as part of an active statutory assessment process between Oranga Tamariki and a provider.

The assessment remains underway, and no decisions have yet been made regarding the future of the Whare. Releasing documents generated as part of that process at this stage would be likely to prejudice the orderly and effective conduct of decision-making while officials are actively considering the matters arising from the assessment.

Accordingly, this part of your request is refused under section 9(2)(f)(iv) of the Act, to maintain the constitutional conventions for the time being which protect the confidentiality of advice tendered by Ministers of the Crown and officials.

In accordance with section 9(1) of the Act, I have considered whether the public interest in releasing the information outweighs the need to withhold it. While there is a public interest in transparency regarding matters affecting care settings, I do not consider that this outweighs the need to preserve the integrity of the ongoing statutory assessment and decision-making process while that process remains underway. Should decisions be made following completion of the assessment, any information that can appropriately be released will be considered at that time.

While this information does not directly answer your request, I hope the following contextual information is helpful in understanding current demand within the Dunedin/Otago area.

In the 12 months before the Whare ceased operating, 14 local rangatahi were placed there.

During the first half of 2026, ten rangatahi from Dunedin were remanded in custody and placed in either a youth justice residence or in a community-based placement. Placement decisions are made on a case-by-case basis and take a number of factors into account, including professional assessments and recommendations from social workers.

Of these ten rangatahi, one was assessed as being potentially suitable for placement in the Whare and was accommodated in an alternative placement.

IN-CONFIDENCE

I appreciate your interest in this matter. Oranga Tamariki remains committed to ensuring that decisions about care settings are informed by robust statutory processes and are centred on the safety, wellbeing, and best interests of tamariki and rangatahi. As the section 400 assessment remains underway, it would be inappropriate to predetermine its outcome. Any future decisions regarding the Whare will be made only once the assessment has concluded and all relevant information has been carefully considered.

I trust this information is helpful and provides clarity regarding the current status of the Whare and the processes underway. While I appreciate the interest of local stakeholders in the future of the facility, it is important that the statutory assessment process is allowed to run its course so that any future decisions are informed, fair, and evidence-based.

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

I trust you find this information useful. If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@ot.govt.nz. 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



Benesia Smith, MNZM

Deputy Chief Executive, Commissioning and Investment