



MANAAKITIA A TĀTOU TAMARIKI

Children's
Commissioner

Media release – New Zealand and Canterbury rugby to be applauded on new child-centred approach to misconduct

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Children's Commissioner Andrew Becroft is congratulating the New Zealand and Canterbury rugby unions on a new approach to work better with young players accused of misconduct.

The Canterbury Rugby Union is launching the new guidelines following concerns over a hearing last year where a junior rugby player was found guilty of racial abuse during a match against another school team.

Among the key new provisions, Judge Becroft says when a young player denies the offence they will still be referred to a Judicial Committee hearing, but there will be important improvements.

"In the case last year, there were legitimate concerns raised about the way the misconduct process was handled, with a lengthy hearing going into the evening.

"I'm very pleased that the new guidelines state that questions to witnesses need to be provided 24 hours in advance of the hearing and the judicial committees won't sit past 8 o'clock at night. That's clearly for the best for children attending serious hearings like these.

"It's right that young people are held to account when they have breached the code of behaviour expected but how they are held to account is also critically important. We need to remember that we're dealing with children, not grownups. Using an adult process is not appropriate for a young teenager."

The Office of the Children's Commissioner offered assistance in developing the guidelines but Judge Becroft says the rugby unions have delivered beyond his expectations.

"It's great that rugby itself has taken the lead on this and developed a child-friendly approach. It's the sort of approach that we would hope other sporting bodies would also follow."

He says the guidelines' use of a Community Group Conference where a young player does not deny misconduct is also a good way to settle the matter using a restorative justice process. "The New Zealand Rugby Union is to be congratulated for how quickly and appropriately they've developed the new guidelines and so is the Canterbury Rugby Union for agreeing to trial them.

"This fundamental change to the process should be much more likely to engage children and result in prompt and constructive resolution of complaints."

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