



**Health
Information
and Quality
Authority**

An tÚdarás Um Fhaisnéis
agus Cáilíocht Sláinte



Your guide to the National Standards for Special Care Units

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About this guide

This guide outlines the standards that special care units must meet so that the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) can register them.

Who is the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA)?

The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) is an independent organisation. We have the legal power and responsibility for improving the quality, safety and value of certain health and social care services in Ireland, including special care units.

We are also responsible for:

- **setting standards**
- **monitoring and inspecting services**
- **providing guidance on health information**
- **carrying out health technology assessments.**

What are special care units?

Special care units are secure, residential centres for children aged 11 to 17 years. The child is placed in a special care unit by the court when their behaviour poses a risk of harm to their life, health, safety, development or welfare, and the placement is needed for the child's care and protection.

Special care units may be run by the Child and Family Agency, a private organisation or a voluntary body.

Why did we develop the standards?

We developed the National Standards for Special Care Units because we are responsible by law for registering and inspecting these units.

We will keep a register (list) of centres and monitor and inspect them regularly to check that they are meeting the standards and their legal obligations. By regulating services, we can make sure that children living in special care units receive safe and effective care, no matter who is running the service.

What do the standards cover?

The standards cover eight areas called themes.

Each standard describes an 'outcome'. This is what a special care unit should do to provide a good-quality and safe service for children.

Each standard also has a number of features which describe what a special care unit is likely to be doing to meet the standard.

The themes of the National Standards



Overview of the eight themes

Theme	Description of theme
Child-centred services	This theme describes how special care units place children at the centre of what they do. Protecting the rights of children comes under this theme.
Effective services	This theme describes how special care units can deliver the best outcomes for children, using the best available evidence and information.
Safe services	This theme outlines how special care units protect children through preventing and minimising harm, and learning from things when they go wrong.
Health and development	This theme describes how special care units identify and promote best possible health and development opportunities for children.
Leadership, governance and management	This theme describes how special care units organise and run ('govern') themselves, arrange accountability, make decisions, manage risks and dangers, and meet their strategic, legal and financial obligations.

Overview of the eight themes

Theme	Description of theme
Use of resources	This theme describes how special care units can use their resources to deliver the best achievable outcomes for children with the money and resources available.
Responsive workforce	This theme covers planning, recruiting, managing and organising staff so that special care units have the numbers, skills and abilities they need to respond to the needs of children.
Use of information	This theme describes how special care units can use information to plan, deliver, monitor, manage and improve their services.



National Standards for Special Care Units

Theme 1: Child-centred services

This theme describes how special care units place children at the centre of what they do. It says that special care units must:

- respect and promote the rights and individuality of each child
- respect the privacy and dignity of each child
- allow children to make choices in their daily lives and experience care and support
- let each child develop and maintain relationships with family, community and other people who play an important role in their lives
- communicate with and provide information to children in a way that the child understands
- allow each child to take part in decisions that affect their life and make sure they have access to an advocate
- listen to, and act upon, each child's concerns and complaints.

Theme 2: Effective services

This theme describes how special care units can deliver effective services to children using the best available evidence and information. It says:

- children are only placed in special care units by the High Court under a special care order
- children must have a plan which outlines their needs and the supports they need to maximise their personal development
- a special care unit must be run like a home and must promote the welfare, dignity and safety of each child
- plans detailing required supports must be in place before a child leaves a unit
- a special care unit must keep a detailed care record for each child.

Theme 3: Safe services

This theme describes how special care units can deliver safe services for children. It says that special care units must:

- protect each child from abuse and neglect, and promote their welfare
- provide care that supports positive behaviour by the child and nurtures their emotional wellbeing
- not restrict a child unless there is a serious risk to the child's safety and welfare, or the safety and welfare of others
- manage and review incidents promptly and use the lessons learned to improve practice at all levels.

Theme 4: Health and development

This theme describes how health, education, social and emotional development and relationships with family and community are important factors in a child's development. It says that special care units must:

- promote the health and development of each child
- assess each child's health and give appropriate support to meet any identified need
- enable children to maximise their individual strengths and abilities through education.

Theme 5: Leadership, governance and management

This theme covers required arrangements as to how a special care unit is organised and run (governed). The centre must put systems in place in areas such as accountability, decision-making and managing risks and dangers. It says a special care unit must have:

- clear lines of accountability at all levels so that everyone working in the special care unit knows their responsibilities and to whom they answer
- a written statement of purpose that sets out the special care unit's aims and objectives and the services it provides
- systems in place to check practice and performance in providing child-centred, effective and safe services
- a written agreement with the organisation that funds the special care unit outlining the nature and conditions of the services the special care unit provides.

Theme 6: Use of resources

This theme describes how a special care unit can use its money and resources to deliver services in the best possible way. It says a special care unit must:

- look for opportunities to provide improved services and achieve better outcomes for children
- take into account the needs of children and the levels of demand on the service when making decisions about use of resources
- make sure that staff make informed decisions on how resources are used and are accountable for those decisions.

Theme 7: Responsive workforce

This theme applies to everyone who works, either directly or indirectly, with a special care unit. It covers planning, recruiting, managing and organising staff. It says:

- each staff member has an important part to play in delivering child-centred, safe and effective services to children in special care units
- a special care unit must make sure that staff have the skills and experience needed to protect children and promote their welfare
- staff must receive support, training, and supervision so they can perform their jobs to the best of their ability
- a special care unit must use safe recruitment practices and review staff performance regularly to make sure services are child-centred, safe and effective.

Theme 8: Use of information

This theme describes how special care units can use information to plan, deliver, monitor, manage and improve services for children. It says that special care units must:

- use all relevant information to plan and deliver child-centred, safe and effective services
- record all information accurately and store it securely.



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