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Situation of the European Schools in Brussels – temporary site in Evere

**Board of Governors of the European Schools**

Meeting from 15 to 17 April 2020

1. **BACKGROUND**

In 2010, by written procedure, the Board of Governors approved the setting-up of a fifth European School in Brussels and requested the Belgian Government to make the necessary arrangements for a school with capacity for 2500 pupils to be made available in September 2015, requesting the European Commission to keep the Budgetary Authorities (Council and European Parliament) informed of this proposal.

On 18 December 2015, the Council of Ministers of Belgium’s Federal Government agreed to make a fifth European School available by 2019-2020, with the temporary Berkendael site continuing to operate until the new school opens.

At its meeting of 1-3 December 2015, the Board of Governors approved temporary use of the Berkendael site as an extension to the European School, Brussels I, pending opening of the European School, Brussels V.

The Berkendael site’s intake consists of French language section pupils and of Latvian and Slovakian language section pupils, the creation of the latter two sections in the nursery and primary cycles also having been approved by the Board of Governors at its December 2015 meeting. Moreover, over the years, satellite classes corresponding to German, Greek, Italian and Spanish sections had also to be opened.

**II. The infrastructure and the current pupil population of the Brussels Schools**

There are currently four European Schools (ES) in Brussels: the ES, Brussels I, the ES, Brussels II, the ES, Brussels III and the ES, Brussels IV, in addition to which there is the Berkendael temporary site as an extension to the ES, Brussels I.

For some years now, the total pupil population in Brussels has been regularly increasing, at a rate of around 400 pupils per year; this year, for the first time, the increase is closer to 500 pupils. It should be noted that last year the figure was abnormally low. As if there would have been a balance settled back, one year later.

It can thus be seen that on 15 October 2019, the pupil population of the Brussels European Schools is continuing to grow:



This overall situation also needs to be taken into consideration in relation to the theoretical capacity of each school and their respective pupil numbers on 15 October 2019, appearing below:



Details of the situation of the different Schools was already given in December 2018 (2018-11-D-31), in April 2019 (2019-04-D-5) and in December 2019 (2019-11-D-17).

At the level of each school, the situation is as follows:

* At the **Brussels I** School**,** on the Uccle site, the total number of pupils – 3 349 – is still as large, despite a slight fall of 41 pupils in 2019 (for the record, the school’s theoretical capacity is 3 100 pupils).

On the **Berkendael** site, the capacity of which is 1 000, the number of pupils is up from 559 on 15 October 2018 to 730 pupils on 15 October 2019. On that site, the French language section accounts for 66% of pupil numbers (71% in 2018 – 81% in 2017), whilst the satellite classes are developing, since an additional year group is opened each year, but the initial year group (Nursery) has to be kept. In the case of a combined class (N1+N2), the places liberated by the shift of pupils from N2 to P1 at the end of the school year, have always been occupied by new enrolments in N1, since the class must continue to exist for N1 pupils progressing to N2.

Thus, in 2019/2020 school year, N1-P4 DE, N1-P1 EL, EN, ES and IT classes were opened.

* The number of pupils on roll at the **Brussels II** School (3 175 pupils on 15 October 2019 / theoretical capacity of 2 850 pupils) rose by 100 pupils.
* The overcrowding of the **Brussels III** School has worsened, with 103 more pupils on roll (3 202 pupils on 15 October 2019 / theoretical capacity of 2 650 pupils). It should be noted that the number of pupils in the EL language section is still very large (609 pupils in 2019, as compared with 584 in 2018 and 581 in 2017).
* The **Brussels IV** School has largely overcome its theoretical capacity of 2 800 pupils (2 974 pupils on 15 October 2019), with 139 more pupils than last year. The secondary cycle and certain recently created sections are continuing to develop.

It should be noted that on 15 October 2019, the overcrowding of the Brussels Schools already corresponded to more than 1000 pupils. This situation is always worse, at a time when a great deal of attention is being paid to the safety of the Schools’ sites. A few places remain available in the secondary cycle of the ES, Brussels IV, but they would need to be used for development of the more recently created sections, the year groups which are gradually being opened each year.

There is still some capacity on the Berkendael site, but the overall development of the satellite classes will become source of concerns in the near future, when alternative solutions would not be applied.

The figures on pupil numbers in the four schools show that it is absolutely essential to have additional infrastructure available as soon as possible.  In any case, no later than September 2021.

The Vice-Prime Minister Geens wrote to the Commissioner Hahn announcing:

“According to schedule, the temporary construction, with a capacity of 1500 students, will be ready in time for the School to start its activities in September 2021.

The temporary construction will be used until the construction of the new School is ready. In the meantime also the Berkendael school will be kept available.”

(see attached letter, **Annex 1**)

**III. Communications from the Belgian Authorities on the making available of a fifth European School in Brussels and of a temporary site for 1500 Nursery and Primary pupils in Evere, as of September 2021**

As a reminder, at its meeting in December 2018, the Board of Governors was informed that the making available of a fifth European School, according to the technical level of the Belgian Authorities (Regie des Bâtiments) would be a minimum of five years behind schedule in relation to the undertaking given by the Council of Ministers of the Belgian Federal Government, which was to make such a school available to the system by September 2019 (2018-11-D-31).

As regards to the location of the fifth School, it was confirmed that, on a proposal of the Ministry of Defence, the Council of Ministers of the Belgian Federal Government, at its meeting on 5 October, approved a note providing for assignment of a 4-hectare plot of land on the site of NATO’s former headquarters for the construction of a fifth European School.

Already in February 2019, the Secretary-General (SG) was told that, on a proposal from the Minister charged with the *Régie des Bâtiments* (*RdB*) (Belgian Public Buildings Authority), the Council of Ministers of the ‘caretaker’ Government should have approved:

– the planned construction of a fifth European School on the aforementioned site;

– the making available to the European Schools on a definitive basis of the Berkendael site;

– the Memorandum of Understanding between Commissioner Oettinger and the Belgian Minister, Mr Geens;

– the implementation of a temporary solution pending construction of the fifth European School.

The *RdB*, without a clear political mandate, had inquired into the possibility of having a temporary site on a piece of land on the former NATO site. It was confirmed by the Defence Ministry, the owner of the land, that it would be feasible to use a well-located piece of land. The *RdB* Management has been exploring this avenue and has received from the SG a set of requirements for the facilities needed for a Primary and Nursery site for 1500 pupils.

The proposal is to build a temporary school using prefabricated units, on part of the old NATO premises. This is also to be the site of the fifth European School (EEB5), meaning that this is an ideal location as pupils could eventually transfer easily from the prefabricated units to EEB5, once construction is complete. The *RdB* has informed us that although there are existing prefabricated units on that land, they are not suitable for conversion into a school, so they will be completely removed and replaced by a structure purpose-built for schooling.

The Steering Committee welcomed this proposal and agreed to accept it. It was felt, particularly by the Parents’ Representatives, to be a better solution than the Rue du Commerce[[1]](#footnote-1) site, because it can be built to meet all the requirements of a school and could act as the kernel from which the fifth school can grow and develop. It is also easily accessible by school bus transport, since according to the *RdB*, the piece of land is large enough to accommodate a bus park. According to the *RdB*, NATO sports facilities could be made available to pupils, so that there would be no need to build sport facilities. The Steering Committee agreed that the NATO temporary site would be suitable to accommodate Nursery and Primary level pupils.

The *RdB* did, however, issue a caveat; the site would not be ready before September 2021. The 2020 horizon for a temporary site is already critical for enrolments; 2021 would merely exacerbate the situation.

Since then, the *RdB* has officially communicated that the Council of Ministers has decided on the construction of a temporary site for 1500 pupils in the Nursery and Primary levels, the delivery of which, according to schedule is foreseen on 2 August 2021, on a piece of land on the site of NATO’s former headquarters.

The *RdB* also announced that the date for the making available of the EEB5 had now become September 2026, at the earliest.

Each year there is a need for some 400-450 additional places in the Brussels Schools, so by 2026, when EEB5 would now be scheduled to open, there will most probably be 2400-2700 additional pupils. Some 300 pupils can still be enrolled at Berkendael for the enrolment campaign for September 2020: at least some 100-150 of the expected increase of pupils will still need to be accommodated on the other sites, which are all already overcrowded. **As from September 2021, there is no space left for the remainder, unless additional capacity is provided.**

In order to avoid the risk of having to limit new enrolments, it would be crucial that the expected date for the delivery of the temporary site in Evere not be deferred beyond September 2021.

Parents’ representatives, during the meeting of the Steering Committee Brussels, regretted that the SG would not consider that option (limit new enrolments) would not be applied already for the enrolment campaign for September 2020.

**Refusal to enrol Category I pupils, due to a lack of available places, would, however, constitute a failure to fulfil the primary mission entrusted to the European Schools in Article 1 of the Convention defining the Statute of the European Schools. In this respect, the Secretary-General believes that it should be avoided by any reasonable mean.**

It is highly regrettable that since 5 October 2018, decision of the Council of Ministers on the EEB5’s location, the date for the EEB5 has been referred as to be expected deferred by two years (from September 2024 to 2026).

For the record, in **Annex 2**, a table and graphs can be found, illustrating the pattern of development of the pupil population in the European Schools in Brussels, based on its growth as recorded this year and up to September 2026, when the EEB is scheduled to be made available.

**IV. Proposal for an optimal use of the temporary site for 1500 Nursery and Primary pupils in Evere, as of September 2021**

Three meetings of the Steering Committee Brussels (SCB) have been organised: on 3 March, on 25 March and on 1 April.

During those meetings, it was clarified by RdB that the construction of **the permanent fifth school** had not yet been decided by the Council of Ministers.

A dossier would need to be prepared and presented to the government in place, which will deliver the final decision on the construction, including the timeline and the budget. The RdB intends to elaborate and submit the dossier by the end of 2020.

As to **Berkendael**, the site remains available until the construction of the fifth school.

The future of the site after that date is not yet decided. Whether or not it will belong to the ES system on a definitive basis, has not yet been decided, despite the reiterated requests formulated by the SG.

On 31 January 2020, the Council of Ministers of the Belgian Federal Government (Conseil des Ministres) approved the setting up of the **provisional school for transitional use,** pending the construction of the fifth school, on a plot of land of the former NATO site, with a capacity of accommodating 1500 pupils. The decision is to build a temporary school (Evere) using prefabricated units on part of the old premises of the NATO, which is also expected to be the site of the permanent fifth ES (on a different plot of land). Both the financial aspects and the planning for the construction work were approved. The planning was further fine-tuned and tightened following a dialogue between the Brussels urbanistic authorities and the RdB, in a way that the making available would be by September 2021, according to the proposition. The construction works will start in January 2021 and will be terminated by 2 August 2021.

The RdB has completed the preparatory work on the planning, based on the information given by the SG, regarding the specifications and needs, e.g. the number and sizes of the classrooms, the special rooms, the canteen, etc. These specifications are based on the ones we had when Brussels III was built (last school built on an empty plot of land), recalculated for a capacity of 1500 pupils in nursery and primary.

RdB informed that there would be no sport facilities on the site, however, there is currently a dialogue with the Ministry of Defence, in order to find an arrangement and make sure that sport facilities will be available for the pupils.

The pieces of land are identified for both, but for the permanent school not yet validated. The two lands are not adjacent, but not far from each other.

The schedule is very tight.

An official mail, with the note of the Council of Ministers, detailing the decision will be sent to the members of the SCB. The planning and the timeline will be attached to this official document, confirming the decision made regarding the construction of the temporary site.

To date, only the planning has been received and shared with other stakeholders.

The starting point for any proposal on the use of the transitory site, is that it will be able to accommodate 1500 pupils in the Nursery and Primary cycles. In addition, the Board of Governors will have to approve the enrolment policy for 2021/2022 in **December 2020**. The proposition therefore needs to be made accordingly.

The situation of the pupils’ population in the ES in Brussels on 15 October 2019 has already been presented.

Based on the communication of the RdB earlier, the future of Berkendael is still undecided and likely remains that way until the delivery of the fifth school.

During the meeting on 25 March “Guidelines for the use of the temporary site in Evere as of September 2021” (2020-03-D-32-en-1) were proposed by the SG and received general support from the members of the Steering Committee Brussels (SCB), with the exception of the Representative of Parents who declared not having a mandate from their constituency.

It has been considered whether Evere should be looked at as a transitory site for the newly created fifth school (EEB5). This case (creation of the fifth school on the temporary site), would entail, amongst others, creation of sections that will be accommodated by the fifth school. So once a student is enroled in the temporary site in Evere, will be able to continue in the fifth school. Nevertheless, this approach requires more time and in-depth analysis and long-term study in order to identify in the most rational way possible the language sections to create and possibly move. The necessity to have a decision on the Guidelines for Enrolment Policy for the school year 2021-22 already in December 2020, among others, would make this possibility not really practicable.

The System has the experience of Berkendael as temporary site. So making use of Evere as an annex administered by another school, as is the case for Berkendael, would definitely be an alternative option.

There are, anyway, also downsides.

Creation of new sections in Berkendael has not evolved really positively (except for FR section). There was no decision from the BoG on where those sections should finally land one day. The Gaignages criteria for the creation of the LV and SK sections are still not met, after four years.

Today, after 4 years, the LV section counts 27 pupils across all N and P levels (7 levels), while the SK section, which has only reached P2 level, accounts for 18 pupils (4 levels).

In order to fill up better the site, satellite classes had to be created on the temporary site. After 4 years, the site is not completely used (730 pupils for a total capacity of 1000), while the other sites are constantly more overcrowded.

Moreover, it can be observed that the pupils’ population in some satellite classes in Berkendael could be easily distributed across the existing classes in other schools. Its creation indeed contributed to lowering the pressure on the other sites, but lacks efficiency. In addition, the result of non-systematic creation of satellite classes could be that the site would not be able to manage to host all nursery and primary classes corresponding to all those “satellite” languages, generating a serious problem in the medium term.

Whenever possible, it would be better to avoid repeating these negative experiences, when making use of the new transitory site in Evere.

One of the main constraints in the more efficient use of the available space are the re-grouping of siblings. When a child of a group of siblings is already enrolled in a European School, the Board of Governors has decided (and the Appeal Board has ruled in the same direction), that sibling would have the right to be enrolled in the same school.

This has an impact on the positive evolution of newly created language sections, when these are not created in the same school where SWALS pupils corresponding to the same language were enrolled. Siblings newly enrolled, despite the existence of a language section, go on being enrolled as SWALS in the same school of their already enrolled sibling.

At the same time, regrouping the siblings limit the marge of manoeuvre in the use of available space.

This problem has led to an alternative proposal for the use of the temporary site of Evere: rather that considering the site as an annex, independent from the school/site that will have to administer it, it could be considered an integral part of it.

The closest school to Evere is the European School Brussels 2 – Woluwe (EEB2). So if Evere became part of EEB2, all new enrolments in the Nursery and Primary levels and sections existing in EEB2, which would not require regrouping of siblings, could be accommodated in new classes created in Evere.

It is a fact that, every year, a considerable number of enrolments correspond to that profile. The table in **Annex 3** shows all new enrolments for September 2019 (Campaign 2019-20) that corresponded to that profile.

During the meeting of the SCB on 1 April, a simulation in that respect was presented, which can be found in **Annex 4**.

The attached **Annex 4** on “simulation Evere” displays:

* Table 1: Pupils’ population in **October 2019** in EEB2
* Table 2: Accepted enrolments without “constraints” (unique section, SWALS, siblings already enrolled, etc.), **corresponsing to the sections functioning in EEB2** during the enrolment campaign for September 2019 (Campaign 2019-20). In this respect, the simulation does not correspond to something that could realistically be achieved in September 2021, but the best approximate of it.
* Table 3: What **potentially** could be done, meaning accepting in EEB2 all “free” enrolments corresponding to the sections existing in EEB2 and the number of new classes that it would entail.

We are in fact, yet again confronted with a limitation: according to the dispositions laid down in the Enrolment Policy and to the pronunciations of the Appeal Board, both:

* **enrolment of siblings** in the same school, but **in two different sites**

and

* **the move of pupils from the site of Woluwe to the site of Evere**

would **not** **be** **possible**.

In terms of the best possible use of the newly available site, this is not ideal and will risk resulting in further overcrowding.

* Table 4 illustrates the maximum that could be achieved in the first year, without having an impact on pupils already enrolled in EEB2, and the maximum number of new classes that it would result. New classes would be created only if there were not enough places in the already existing classes in Woluwe. Figures seem to be encouraging. The total number is very close to the population increase in Brussels that we register over the years. Meaning that, in principle, the vast majority of the increased population could be oriented to Evere.

For the sake of full transparency, it should be mentioned that figures might be lower, since among the children “free” enrolled in Nursery and Primary, these could be some with siblings in secondary, that would have requested grouped enrolment. For the reasons explained, they could not be split over two sites, **despite the fact that the two sites would constitute the same school**.

The same “principle” could be also applied to EEB-Uccle and the Berkendael site. The simulation of the application of the same principle to the Berkendael site is found in **Annex 5**.

This, of course, would require a number of delicate decisions, nonetheless, it would have the advantage to clarify the situation of all the children enrolled in the temporary sites. This would eliminate the necessity to have obligatory transfers from Berkendael, when pupils reach the P5 level. This possibility could be left to the pupils actually enrolled in Berkendael, since their destiny could not be clearer at the moment of their enrolment.

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**V. Conclusions**

The situation in Brussels remains extremely complex.

The risk of refusing to enrol Category I pupils, due to a lack of available places, would continue to exist.

Difficult decisions might need to be taken.

The SG has requested the help of the European Commission’s legal service in order to clarify whether or not, either:

- the enrolment of siblings in the same school, but in two different sites

or

- the move of pupils from the two sites of the same school at some stage during their schooling

would really be of juridical risk.

Provided that this constraint is possible to remove, overcrowding could be solved in September 2021, when the new temporary site in Evere is made available and considered an integral part of EEB2 and at the same time, Berkendael would be really considered as an integral part of EEB1.

Thus, the advantage in terms of safety and well-being of the schools’ Communities would be invaluable.

**VI. Proposal**

The Board of Governors is invited to scrutinise and comment on the present report and to provide the Secretary-General with guidelines on how to best pursue the work.

**Annex I -** Vice-Prime Minister Geens’ letter to the Commissioner Hahn on 5 February 2020



**Annex 2**

**Development by + 400 pupils per year with temporary site available in 2021**

**Annex 3**

New pupils (Category I, Eurocontrol, Category II, NATO/UN) who have accepted a place during Phases I and II and who do not benefit from a special priority criteria (regrouping of siblings, return from assignment, return from a study abroad during Phase I, particular circumstances), from having SWALS status, compulsory transfers not included





**Annex 4 – Simulation Evere**

**Table 1 – Pupils’ population in the European School Brussels II, Woluwe on 15 October 2019**



**Table 2 – Accepted enrolments without ‘constraints’**



**Table 3 – Pupils’ population with all new ‘free’ enrolments and the number of new classes**



**Table 4 – Simulation without having an impact on pupils already enrolled in EEB2 and the possible total of new classes**



**Annex 5 – Simulation Berkendael**

**Table 1 – Population in Brussels I – sites in Uccle and in Berkendael**



The attached **Annex 5** displays:

* Pupils’ population in **October 2019** in Berkendael
* Accepted enrolments without “constraints” (unique section, SWALS, siblings already enrolled, etc.), **corresponsing to the section(s) functioning only in EEB1** during the enrolment campaign for September 2019 (Campaign 2019-20). The same method applied in case of Evere.
* What **potentially** could be done, meaning accepting in Berkendael all “free” enrolments corresponding to the sections existing in EEB1

We are, yet again confronted with the same limitation: according to the dispositions laid down in the Enrolment Policy and to the pronunciations of the Appeal Board, both:

* **enrolment of siblings** in the same school, but **in two different sites**

and

* **the move of pupils from the site of Woluwe to the site of Evere**

would **not** **be** **possible**.

In order to rationalise the use of Berkendael the following actions could be proposed:

* the FR section exists in EEB1-Uccle, so those pupils already enrolled in Berkendael could continue their education in EEB1-Uccle or been given the possibility to ask a volunteer transfer (uncertainty at the moment of the enrolment) into another school when they would move to Secondary;
* the DE section also exists in EEB1-Uccle, so those pupils already enrolled in Berkendael in the DE satellite classes could continue their education in EEB1-Uccle or been given the possibility to ask a volunteer transfer (uncertainty at the moment of the enrolment) when they would move to Secondary;
* the EN section also exists in EEB1-Uccle, so those pupils already enrolled in Berkendael in the EN satellite classes could continue their education in EEB1-Uccle. The existence of the P1 class is not really justified, so pupils could join the P1 class in EEB1-Uccle, gaining efficiency;
* the ES section also exists in EEB1-Uccle, so those pupils already enrolled in Berkendael in the ES satellite classes could continue their education in EEB1-Uccle. The existence of the N1 class is not really justified, so pupils could join the N1 class in EEB1-Uccle, gaining efficiency; pupils in N2 would require anyway two P1 classes;
* the IT section also exists in EEB1-Uccle, so those pupils already enrolled in Berkendael in the IT satellite classes could continue their education in EEB1-Uccle. The existence of the P1 class is not really justified, so pupils could join the P1 class in EEB1-Uccle, gaining efficiency;
* The LV section, as already mentioned, has not reached the necessary level of enrolments to justify the existence of the section. It would be proposed to move it to the Evere site, since the LV SWALS pupils are enrolled in EEB2
* The SK section, as already mentioned, has not reached the necessary level of enrolments to justify the existence of the section. It would be proposed to move it to EEB3, since the SK SWALS pupils are enrolled in EEB3.
* The EL section exists only in EEB3, so pupils in the EL satellite classes would join EEB3, gaining efficiency, since the three P1 classes are not justified

1. As far as the temporary solution is concerned, in December 2018, only one possibility had been proposed, namely the ‘La Trésorerie’ (‘Finances’) building (Rue du Commerce), currently being rented by the Régie des Bâtiments until 2027 and conveniently located in relation to the European Institutions. Given that this building currently houses offices, the possibility of converting it into a school had been studied and a change of intended use would be necessary. The project was then abandoned. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)