

News

European schools' overcrowding problems in the shadow of the Covid-19 pandemic

18/06/2020 6 5



The closure of the so-called "on-site" education in the Brussels European schools, the frantic launch of distance learning and the chaos caused by the sudden reopening of the primary level, concealed the important problem of overcrowding that is getting more serious with every passing month.

The June-October 2020 period is crucial for the procurement of the new temporary primary school at the old NATO site in Evere, which is supposed to be operational in September 2021. Without this school, the overcrowding may become critical and as already noted could lead to non-admission of category 1 students – children of the staff of European institutions.

The temporary school is planned to be a quickly-built modular structure intended to hold up to 1500 students. It will help to reduce the overcrowding in all four Brussels schools on the primary level. By early Autumn 2020 the construction process needs to have advanced to a state where this new site can be included in the drafting of the 2021-2022 Enrolment Policy.

Current proposals, based upon availability of this new site amount to turning EEB1-Uccle+Berkendael and EEB2-Woluve+Evere into "super schools" with total theoretical capacities of 4100 and 4350 respectively and a wider range and larger size of sections. EEB3-Ixelles and EEB4-Laeken would become smaller schools (total theoretical capacities of 2650 and 2850 respectively) with a potentially narrower range and smaller size of sections.

However, there is another question. Both temporary sites – the existing one in Berkendael, and the future one in Evere – are dedicated to hosting primary level schools and do not solve the problems further down the road.

The permanent fifth school in Brussels is foreseen as a full primary and secondary campus for 2500 students and is currently scheduled to open in September 2026. Even this date, which is a decade later than expected, may be optimistic by most estimates, and by the time the fifth school opens a sixth school may be already needed.

Moreover, the current allocation of the Berkendael site for use as a European school runs out when the fifth school opens its doors.

The whole issue requires a close overview, and not only monitoring of the progress but also quick identification and removal of any obstacles. Your Local Staff Committee will keep an eye on this matter, as access to European schools is a crucial element of the attractiveness of the European public service and as such cannot be compromised.

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