

1. Overview

The 2021-2022 school year was the first "normal" school year since the end of containment.

The number of bus drivers available in Belgium does not cover the number of drivers needed, both in our service and in the public and private sector. We have observed that when drivers are ill, bus companies rarely manage to replace them. In addition, strike action seems to be followed by some of the drivers of some of the largest companies.

Despite the financial incentives already offered last year, the number of drivers remained insufficient and they are aware of this shortage: we have seen a record number of attitude and compliance problems among more drivers, especially in the wearing of masks when it was still mandatory.

Every member of my team, including the manager and the director, has been verbally abused and/or disrespected by some drivers.

The pressure put on our service by this kind of behaviour became too much to bear and was disrupting the normal functioning of our service. We therefore decided not to let this happen anymore and simply not to let buses run with these drivers, instead of letting them work until the bus companies could find a substitute.

As far as the bus monitors are concerned, we had foreseen difficulties last year in having an adult on each bus and, in addition, the school put an end to its contract with the Agence Locale pour l'Emploi (ALE). As a result, we have had to register with the ALE as a non-profit organisation with the direct consequence of reducing the number of cheques we are allowed to give to the bus monitors as payment. For information, under the status of the school we could distribute up to 70 per month (1 cheque per hour worked). As an AiSBL we can only give 45 cheques per month, and 45 hours only covers 2/3 of the usual working time per month of a bus monitor who works in the morning and on the return journeys. We have tried to cope with this by employing some of the monitors on contract, which means that they lose their unemployment benefits, resulting in a lower monthly income if they work for us on contract than if they were unemployed full time with additional ALE cheques.

We hired half a dozen students to help in the mornings with very encouraging results, particularly in terms of helping with the development of the bus attendance management application.

a. Punctuality

The punctuality figures are similar to those of the previous year, with a decrease of 1% compared to last year, and 2% compared to 2019-2020 for morning journeys: the return to work in the office for most companies does not seem to impact our service too much.

- Percentage of buses on time to school in the morning (before 8.10 am): 96% (compared to 97% in 2020-2021).

- No data for return journeys as the Vetasoft app that was supposed to help us could only work for a non-representative number of bus lines.

b. Childcare centres served

The lines maintained are: Barnepark, Berkendael (last year), Cole, Geneva, Van Maerlant, Wilson.

For Berkendael, there is still one child registered from Laeken. Indeed, the OIB still accepts children from Laeken who were already enrolled in the garderie the previous year or who attended the garderie when EEB4 was on the Berkendael site, and for this reason this school year is the last one in which this stop will be made.

We have heard of a possible closure of the Garderie Genève site, but nothing specific yet. The number of pupils registered to go to Garderie Genève is 30 (22 in 2022-2023).

c. Bus monitors

Number of regular bus monitors (minimum 20 hours worked during the year): 86 (+5 compared to 2020-2021, knowing that in 2019-2020 we had 87, 102 in 2018-2019 and 108 in 2017-2018). The 2021-2022 school year is the first year to end with more regular bus monitors than the previous year since the 2017-2018 school year.

Among the monitors, 8 were either paid in ALE or as volunteers, and finished the school year on contract with us. We also had 6 student bus monitors on student contracts.

d. The parking team

Same remark as last year: the setting up of this team is a real plus. The direct contact via walkie-talkie between the parking lot and the Transport office makes it possible to deal immediately with issues that would otherwise have required more time and energy; i.e. teachers who are not sure whether they have taken a pupil to the right bus, parents who have come to pick up their child and are wondering whether he or she is perhaps on the bus (which has not yet left), pupils (generally from secondary) whose parents have not communicated their bus number, etc.

At the time of departure, they also inform us by talkie of the buses that were not there at the time of the closing of the gate, which allows us to check faster and earlier with the bus companies concerned if there might be a problem of cancellation or delay. At the same time, this allows us to quickly notify parents and give them the opportunity to make arrangements (in case of bus cancellation) and gives us the time to consider and implement plans "B" (e.g. to split the pupils of a cancelled 3.20 pm bus onto the equivalent of the 4.10 pm departure).

2. Situation and evolution (comparison with previous year - indicated in brackets)

There has been a steady increase in enrolment, but less than last year for the morning. This is still due to the growth in the number of pupils enrolled in the school.

a. Mornings

2538 pupils registered (+34, compared to +74 the previous year) for 376 stops (-2, compared to -8 the previous year), 56 buses (idem). The average occupancy rate is 88% (-1%, compared to +0.5% the previous year)

b. Return trips

- First departure at 3.20 pm on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday:
 - 320 stops (+5, compared to +6 the previous year), 33 buses (-3, compared to +2 the previous year) including 5 daycare centres (-3) for 1503 pupils registered (-60, compared to +32 the previous year). The average occupancy rate of the buses for the 3.20 pm departure (excluding childcare centres) is 92% (-3%, compared to +2% the previous year).
- Second departure at 16.10 on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday:
 - 355 stops (+15, compared to -7 the previous year), 34 buses (+1, compared to +2 the previous year), including 2 buses serving "Garderie" destinations, for 1999 pupils registered (+196, compared to +63 the previous year). The theoretical average occupancy rate of the buses for the 4.10 pm departure is 111%. This value reflects the number of registrations, not the number of pupils actually present on the bus. This perception of overcrowding is caused by the enrolment of pupils who go to extracurricular activities and require a seat on a 4.10 pm bus even if only once a week.
- Wednesday noon:

- 374 stops (+12, compared to -8 the previous year), 53 buses (-2, compared to +1 the previous year), including 8 to childcare centres, for 2,565 registered pupils (+91). The average occupancy rate, excluding daycare buses, is 96%.

- Friday lunchtime at 1pm:
 - 4 buses (going to 4 central OIB nurseries + the Drop OFF Merode) for 100 (-9, compared to -37 the previous year) registered pupils.

The number of pupils having to go to an external childcare centre has dropped again, while the number of pupils using the special "Drop Off" bus to Merode has remained stable.