

# Swedish teachers given permission to ban niqabs in classroom

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Teachers in Swedish schools have been given permission to ban students from wearing Islamic veils that cover their faces, in certain situations. But there can be no general ban on headcoverings such as the hijab or scarves.

This was the ruling this week of the National Agency for Education.

The guidance says that although teachers will have the power to decide whether or not to require students remove their headscarves, schools should attempt to be as accommodating as possible.

The guidance comes in response to a 2009 case in which two women sued an adult education centre in Spånga north of Stockholm after they were banned from class for wearing niqabs.

In December 2010, Sweden's Equality Ombudsman ruled that the ban amounted to a violation of Sweden's anti-discrimination laws, after which the schools agency decided to review previous guidelines regarding the wearing of headscarves in Swedish schools.

Education minister Jan Björklund welcomed the education agency's clarification. "It gives precisely the sort of room to manoeuvre that schools need. Teachers can prohibit veils that cover most of the face, if it inhibits contact and interaction in the classroom," he told the TT news agency. "Classroom lectures are an interplay between people, and in many situations, such interactions require that you can see each others' faces."

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