

NSS backs school's decision to enforce ban on face coverings

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The National Secular Society has given its backing to one of the country's top state schools after it came under fire for upholding its policy of banning the niqab.

Camden School for Girls in London was accused of 'islamophobia' after a 16-year-old pupil was told she cannot attend her A-level lessons wearing a full face veil.

The school's appearance policy states that "inappropriate dress that offends public decency or which does not allow teacher student interactions will be challenged".

The 6th form student has attended the school for the past five years but only recently started wearing the niqab.

In a statement, the governing body said: "The governors' decision was very much an educational one.

"Teachers need to see a student's whole face in order to read the visual cues it provides.

"In addition, it is important for the safety and security of the school community to know who is on site, and to be able to see and identify individuals."

The school's decision has provoked anger with over 1000 people signing a [petition](#) set up by an anonymous campaigner to "stop the Islamophobia".

A [rival petition](#) has since been set up urging people to support the school's decision to ban the Niqab from the classroom.

The National Secular Society dismissed the claim that the school's decision was in any way 'Islamophobic' as "risible".

Stephen Evans, National Secular Society campaigns manager, said: "It's not hard to see why schools may consider the ability to communicate unhindered as paramount. If schools feel that face coverings inhibit interaction in the classroom then they should be free to implement policies that enable staff and students to see each others' faces without being bullied into submission by spurious accusations of 'islamophobia'."

The school also received backing from Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate Maajid Nawaz. He said he did not support a total ban, but said school life was an "identity sensitive situation".

"Let's be consistent," said Mr Nawaz. "You cannot wear a balaclava in school, you cannot wear a cycle helmet. She should take it off and pursue her education."

The school's decision was also backed by Mohammed Amin, Chair of the Conservative Muslim Forum and a patron of Tell MAMA (which monitors anti-Muslim attacks). He tweeted: "I think

Camden School for Girls acted reasonably in refusing to allow a pupil to wear a niqab on educational grounds."

Meanwhile the Conservative MP for Stourbridge, Margot James, also supported the school, saying it was "important that Camden School for Girls stand their ground on the niqab, they should not be forced to teach pupils wearing a full-face veil".

The latest controversy mirrors a similar case in September 2013 when Birmingham Metropolitan College implemented a similar ban – only to overturn it following pressure from campaigners – including mass demonstration against 'Islamophobia' and a huge social media campaign including an online petition signed by 9,000.

At the time Prime Minister David Cameron said it was up to individual schools and colleges to set their own dress code.

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