

France to ban Muslim abaya dress in state schools

[PARIS \(Reuters\)](#) – France will ban children from wearing the abaya, the loose-fitting, full-length robes worn by



some Muslim women, in state-run schools, its education minister said on Sunday ahead of the back-to-school season.

France, which has enforced a strict ban on religious signs in state schools since 19th century laws removed any traditional Catholic influence from public education, has struggled to update guidelines to deal with a growing Muslim minority.

In 2004, it banned headscarves in schools and passed a ban on full face veils in public in 2010, angering some in its five million-strong Muslim community.

“I have decided that the abaya could no longer be worn in schools,” Education Minister Gabriel Attal said in an interview with TV channel TF1. “When you walk into a classroom, you shouldn’t be able to identify the pupils’ religion just by looking at them,”

[He said](#) he will give “clear rules at the national level” to school heads just as they return to classes nationwide from 4 September, *Le Monde* reported.

“Secularism means the freedom to emancipate oneself through school,” Mr Attal said and described the abaya as “a religious gesture, aimed at testing the resistance of the republic toward the secular sanctuary that school must constitute”.

France – known for implementing a strict prohibition on religious symbols within state schools and government buildings – has encountered challenges in modernising its directives to address the country’s expanding Muslim minority.