

## Mother is turned away from parents' evening because she refused to remove full-face veil

- Maroon Rafique missed an important talk concerning her son's university education because she would not remove the niqab

A mother was turned away from a parents' evening because she was wearing a full-face veil.

Maroon Rafique, 40, was told that for the security and safety of children and teachers at the college there was a ban on any type of face coverings.

She was warned that unless she removed her full-face covering, known as the niqab, she would not be allowed into the college to attend.



Embarrassed: Maroon Rafique was turned away from a college parents' evening because she was wearing a veil

In the end, a stunned Mrs Rafique was forced to call her husband, who took her place and went with their son Awais, 18.

Mrs Rafique, who has worn the niqab for seven years, said: 'I'm born in this country and British. Why should what I wear offend anyone? I didn't want to make any fuss. All I wanted was to find out the information to help my son go to university.

'I offered to sit at the back or at the front, anywhere where I wouldn't be seen, if they thought I was going to offend anyone.

'I was really upset because whenever I've visited the college before there's never been a problem, in fact the tutors have been welcoming and friendly.'

Mrs Rafique, of Whalley Range, Manchester, had been invited to attend the parents' evening and talk about her son's education at The Manchester College.

But when the mother of two arrived she was apprehended by security staff in the lobby of the college's Northenden campus.

Mrs Rafique, who is married to double-glazing firm boss Abdul, 40, and has a younger son, Ibrahim, 12, said she felt humiliated.



Apprehended: Mrs Rafique was refused entry to The Manchester College by senior staff who told her there was a ban on face coverings

She added: 'I do get abuse every now and again in the street, which I just have to deal with. However, I was very surprised when I was treated this way by the college.'

Business student Awais, 18, who hopes to take an accountancy course at Manchester University, said: 'It was really embarrassing when they told her she couldn't come in. We've never, ever been told about any rule about what parents can wear.'

A spokesman for The Manchester College said Mrs Rafique's concerns were being taken 'very seriously' following the incident.

She added: 'The Manchester College provides a safe and inclusive environment that fosters development and achievement. We apply a single dress code to all college users, including learners and visitors.

'At all times we need to be able to identify all individuals easily in order to maintain safety and security, and therefore we ask that faces are clearly visible while indoors. Our dress code is reviewed through our quality improvement group and we will take this situation into account at the next review.'

In March, a Muslim woman was barred from serving on a jury because she refused to remove her niqab. The judge said she could not sit on an attempted murder trial because the niqab concealed her facial expressions.

And last year, France imposed a total ban on the full-face veil, introducing fines for anyone who breaks the law.