



SEARCH

Sweden wants to curb religious elements in private school education

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STOCKHOLM, Sweden: Sweden wants to curb the influence of religion in private confessional schools in a move to prevent the spread of fundamentalism, government officials said Monday.

The new rules being drafted by the center-right government would ban religious elements in subjects other than religion, such as biology, Education Minister Jan Bjorklund told Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter.

"Students must be protected from every form of fundamentalism," Bjorklund was quoted as saying.

His comments came after a legal dispute involving a Christian sect's efforts to start a confessional school in southern Sweden.

The Exclusive Brethren Christian Fellowship, which dismisses the theory of evolution, was granted permission by a county administrative court to start the school after it promised to follow the Swedish school plan and to welcome all students.

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The decision was widely criticized as the group is perceived to isolate itself by enforcing a number of restrictions on its members.

There are 67 elementary schools and six high schools with a confessional orientation in Sweden, which is a highly secular country. Most of them are Christian. They are outside the public school system, but are governed by Sweden's law on education.

The government claims the law is not clear on how much religious influence is allowed in the curriculum.

The new rules, which need parliamentary approval, would be introduced in 2009, Bjorklund's spokeswoman Anna Neuman told The Associated Press.

"A student shouldn't be able to pass a natural science test by answering that God created the world. We don't think that's OK," Neuman said.

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The schools would also be required to report financial donations to the authorities, she said.

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