

Residents fearful after spate of brutal attacks on pets at schools

RABBITS FROM PAGE 1

Although the attacks have not been directly linked, they are similar in their sadism, police said.

"It appears that we are dealing with one or more people who are killing animals for fun," said a senior police officer at the Kawaguchi Police Station.

Now, educators and residents in Kawaguchi fear that whoever is behind the attacks will start targeting children.

Hagihara said parents have

quiet" when he explained what had happened to the rabbits.

Since April, at least 86 rabbits and seven chickens kept at 11 schools in Ibaraki, Tochigi, Chiba and Saitama prefectures have been killed. In some cases, the rabbits were bludgeoned to death. Others were dismembered or disemboweled.

bombarded him with calls concerning the safety of the students.

"With the string of murders and attacks on schoolchildren in Kobe, the recent attacks here on small animals strikes close to home," Hagihara said.

On Thursday morning, officials at Kamiaoki Minami Elementary School near Motogo, Minami, Saitama Prefecture, discovered that five of their six rabbits had been killed, appar-

ently by dogs.

"We had just reinforced the fences around the pen after hearing about the other killings," said Isamu Minami, 51, principal at Kamiaoki Minami. "But we never dreamed that our school would be targeted."

Minami said the fence was piled open.

"We are investigating the case from the angle that a person or several persons are involved," said an official with

the Saitama prefectural police, which is investigating four cases in the prefecture.

The officer, who declined to be named, said that while destroying animals is considered a case of damage to property, the brutal nature of the attacks underscores the seriousness of these cases.

"The manner in which the rabbits have been killed is most devious. It bears some resemblance to bullying," the

officer said.

The attacks, believed to be acts of vengeance toward schools, have prompted some communities to order pupils to show up at school in groups.

Licca Kayama, 37, a psychiatrist at a hospital in Saitama Prefecture, said the rabbit slayings are symbolic of the nature of crimes today.

"There is no clear target for the direct aggression" of the instigator, Kayama said.