

Boy's decapitated head found in Kobe

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Yomiuri Shimbun

KOBE—The decapitated head of an 11-year-old boy was found Tuesday morning in front of the main gate of Tomogaoka Middle School in Suma Ward, Kobe.

Police have set up an emergency investigation task force at Suma Police Station and are treating it as a murder case.

Police confirmed that the head was that of Jun Hase, a sixth-year pupil at Tainohata Primary School in Kobe, who disappeared Saturday. Hase's body was found at about 3 p.m. on Tuesday in a hillside wood near Tainohata Primary School, about 500 meters southwest of the site where his head was discovered.

An autopsy of the head revealed that he was suffocated about two days ago.

A caretaker at the school reportedly discovered the head lying on the ground in front of the gate at 6:35 a.m. Tuesday. He immediately notified police.

The word "onibara," which means devilish rose, in large characters, and "Watashi o tomeru koto ga dekiruka?" ("Can you stop me?") in smaller characters were found written in red ink on a piece of paper attached to the boy's mouth, according to police. The piece of paper is being examined for fingerprints.

A deep cut was found in the boy's lips as well as minor cuts on other parts of the face. The head had apparently been severed with a sharp knife, police said.

Police believe the head was placed in front of the gate either late Monday night or early Tuesday morning.

According to police, a narrow path that leads to the hillside where the body was found is known only to people familiar with the area. As no bloodstains were found on the ground outside Tomogaoka Middle School, police suspect someone who knew the area murdered the boy and brought his head to the school by car.

The boy was last seen at about 1:30 p.m. on Saturday when he left home to visit his grandfather, who lives about one kilometer



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Police examine the area around the gate of Tomogaoka Middle School where the head of a primary school boy was found Tuesday.

from the boy's home in Suma Ward. Tomogaoka Middle School is located about 400 meters from the grandfather's house.

The boy's father, 41-year-old Mamoru Hase, a doctor, asked police to search for his son at 9 p.m. Saturday.

According to his family, the boy was mentally handicapped and could only say his name.

A girl who attends the same school as the boy told police she had seen him at about 6 p.m. on Saturday at Myohoji subway station, which is about two kilometers from the boy's home, police said.

About 100 people, including police officers, teachers and parents of students at the school the boy attended, unsuccessfully searched for Hase on Sunday and Monday. Tomogaoka Middle School was closed Tuesday because of the discovery of the head.

This case comes less than two months after two girls who attended Ryugadai Primary School, also in Suma Ward, were attacked in separate incidents near their

school on the afternoon of March 16. One of the girls, Ayaka Yamashita, later died from her injuries. Police have yet to make an arrest in connection with the attacks and are investigating the possibility that they may be linked to Hase's death.

Teachers at Tainohata Primary School asked students to come to school and to return home in groups after the attacks in March. They also told students to avoid walking alone on the weekends and holidays, and to never go anywhere with strangers.

Murder cases on rise

The slaying of a boy in Kobe was the 69th murder this year, 18 more than those committed by the same date last year, police said Tuesday. Only 40 cases have been solved so far this year.

Since 1989, the first year of the Heisei era, 1994 holds the record for the number of murders committed with 142. But criminologists fear the record may be broken this year.