

Japanese principal, student commit suicide--report

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TOKYO - A Japanese elementary school principal was found hanged in a forest on Sunday in an apparent suicide, and a junior high school girl jumped to her death the same day, Kyodo news agency said.

The principal was the second to take his own life in as many weeks, while Japan's education ministry last week received seven letters apparently written by students threatening suicide in response to harassment by bullying classmates

[A series of suicides by students in recent weeks caused by bullying](#) has seized public attention at a time when debate is heating up on education reform, a key plank in Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's conservative policy agenda.

The principal, Kenji Nagata, 56, had been criticised after an incident in which a 10-year-old girl was extorted out of 100,000 yen (\$850) by eight schoolmates. He had reported the matter to the board of education in Kitakyushu, southern Japan, as "financial trouble" rather than bullying.

The 12-year-old girl, who leaped from the eighth floor of a public housing building, was a student in Tondabayashi near Osaka in west Japan. She left a suicide note that did not refer to bullying, but some classmates said she had been teased about her body shape when she was in elementary school, Kyodo quoted the police as saying.

In late October a high school principal in Ibaraki, north of Tokyo, hanged himself in woods near his home after his school was found to be one of hundreds that skipped required courses so students could focus on competitive university entrance exams.

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Bullying leads students in Japan to suicide

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Reporter: Shane McLeod

Education officials in Japan face a worrying weekend.

They've been caught up in a scandal over bullying in the nation's schools that's taken a potentially deadly turn.

Someone claiming to be a student has written to the country's Education Minister, threatening to take their own life today, unless the Government does something to deal with the problem of bullying.

Our North Asia Correspondent Shane McLeod reports.

SHANE MCLEOD: The letter addressed to Japan's Education Minister Bunmei Ibuki was blunt.

The anonymous sender, believed to be a male junior high school student, said they were being bullied.

"And if nothing changes, I'm going to commit suicide", the writer warned, identifying today, November the 11th, as the date.

An emergency press conference by the Minister and officials urged the student not to follow through on their threat, a call echoed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

(Sound of Prime Minister Abe speaking)

"Schools and teachers should be aware of the signs of bullying and be sensitive to them," Mr Abe says.

"It's necessary for the school, the education boards, and families to unite to deal with the bullying problems. We have to make sure that children who think they are being bullied can easily talk to counsellors".

The Education Minister received another letter from another anonymous student mid-week.

"I will die on the 11th," the writer said. "I will also kill everyone who bullied me".

There have been a series of suicides by students that have been linked to bullying.

One tragic case centred on a year six school girl in Hokkaido who hanged herself, leaving

notes making it clear that she had been bullied by her classmates.

But it took more than a year for the school and local Government to accept that bullying had been a factor.

Yohji Morita is an education expert at Osaka's Shoin Women's University.

(Sound of Yohji Morita speaking)

"This time there was a suicide note," he says, "and the relationship between the bullying the student had suffered and her actions became clear. That's why this case has been widely reported and people are paying attention."

Professor Morita says children are turning to suicide because they believe there's no other option.

The attention on bullying comes as the Government tries to press ahead with one of the reforms championed by new Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

He wants to change Japan's education system, to instil national values and pride.