SUMMARY

On Third-Party Committees for the Investigation of Serious Accidents and Incidents at Schools:
Some Points to be Noted in Investigative Work

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This paper is based on discussions about the role of the third-party committees that in recent years have begun to be formed after a serious accident or incident occurs at a school. I conducted a number of these discussions personally with members of the media, the education authorities, bereaved or otherwise affected families, and persons involved with the committees.

In particular, the paper examines the minimum requirements of which all members, whether they are specialists in education, psychology, medicine, or law, should be aware in conducting the committees’ work.

First, in the Introduction, I describe the current situation in regard to investigative committees, noting that there have as yet been few actual examples of their creation and functioning after a serious accident or incident. Part 1 presents an overview of the various circumstances faced by affected families and describes two conflicting trends, one towards “bringing the situation under control” and the other towards “a fresh start for the school.” Part 2 focuses on the process by which mutual distrust becomes entrenched between the families on the one hand and the school and education authorities on the other, and points out that this is the context within which an investigative committee will be formed.

In Part 3, I discuss a number of points to which the committee should pay attention in conducting actual investigative work in the aftermath of an accident. I emphasize three points: the committee’s relationship with the bereaved or affected family, the importance of taking background factors into account, and the importance of working in close contact with the children who are the parties most directly affected.

In the Conclusion, I point to the need to provide the investigative work with concrete support extending across disciplines such as education, psychology, and law by developing a theoretical foundation, building practical experience, and putting a system in place.