

Claims of teacher abuse a hoax

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surface about 11 a.m. Thursday as the substitute teacher took over for an absent faculty member at Whitehead, on the city's southeast side at 2325 Ohio Parkway.

Jennings said the teacher — whom officials would not identify — has worked several years in the school district and never has been accused of impropriety.

But one after another, students told school authorities Thursday that the teacher had touched them on the buttocks or genitalia. Of 24 children in the class, 13 said they had been abused. Two others said they witnessed the teacher's misbehavior.

Whitehead officials sent a letter home to parents alerting them of the accusations and investigation. They also contacted Rockford police and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

As investigators began conducting interviews Friday, children recanted and admitted the

molestation charges were a hoax.

Police Lt. Dan Gray said the allegations were "not real believable" because of the number of students who claimed to have been victimized when the teacher had been in the classroom less than two hours.

"It just kind of defies logic," Gray said.

School district officials issued a news release late Friday afternoon announcing that the teacher had been cleared and could return to the classroom.

Rose Vanore, who has a child in sixth grade at Whitehead, was shocked to hear that students would fabricate such a story. "It's awful," she said.

DCFS spokeswoman Delores Walton said the agency would take up to 60 days to close the books on the case.

Walton said she agrees that the students should be scolded at least.

"It's something that shouldn't be taken lightly," she said.