

West Lothian cyber attack investigation continues

School staff and pupils have been thanked for their patience, as an investigation into a suspected ransomware attack earlier this week continues

West Lothian's education executive councillor also paid tribute to council IT staff for their prompt response to the incident.

A criminal investigation into a suspected ransomware attack on West Lothian schools is ongoing.

The council was alerted to the cyber-attack on Tuesday afternoon. Schools across the county were able to continue to operate after contingency plans were introduced.

Councillor Andrew McGuire, who chairs the Education Executive told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: 'As we have seen from major high street retailers in recent weeks cyber-attacks are happening with increasing frequency and can cause havoc to organisations in a world now dominated by computers.

"Our dedicated IT staff are working tirelessly to resolve the issues and to get the education IT network back on track.

" I want to thank all the staff and students in schools for their patience over the last few days in what I'm sure is a very unsettling time and would encourage everyone to remain vigilant about cyber-attacks."

A West Lothian Council spokesperson said: “We are continuing to work to mitigate the impact of a suspected criminal ransomware cyber-attack on our education network.

“This remains a live criminal investigation, and we are working with all relevant external agencies including Police Scotland and the Scottish Government.

“There is no evidence that the council’s corporate and public access networks are affected, or that any personal or sensitive data has been accessed.

“The education network remains isolated from the rest of the council’s networks, while our IT Services team and external organisations and agencies investigate the issue and work to restore systems.

“We are very grateful for all the support we have received from various organisations and agencies during this challenging time.

“The council’s contingency plans are operating effectively to ensure that our schools continue to deliver education with minimal impact on pupils, including SQA exams.”

Ransomware is a type of malware which prevents someone from accessing a device and the data stored on it, usually by encrypting files,

Criminal groups will demand a ransom in exchange for decryption. In recent weeks both the Co-op and Marks and Spencer have seen trade disrupted after hackers broke into their IT causing shortages in stores and stalling online ordering.

West Lothian has 13 secondary schools, 69 primary schools and 61 nurseries

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter