OBJECT FIRST

Case Study

Saffron Academy Trust Ransomware-Proofs Backups Supporting 250+ Schools

> **"The team can spend less time worrying about recovery readiness and more time focusing on supporting schools and delivering wider ICT priorities."**

Dan Wright & Ben Johnson,
CT Hub Managers, Saffron Academy Trust

Introduction and Executive Summary

Saffron Academy Trust (SAT) is a multi-academy trust headquartered in Saffron Walden, Essex, UK, responsible for nine different schools. As a regional education leader, SAT also runs the Saffron Teaching School Hub, which provides professional development, teacher training and support to more than 250 schools across Essex. Its ICT environment supports around 8,000 users across multiple school sites.

A cyber incident at one of SAT's sites in 2020 revealed just how disruptive attacks like ransomware can be—and ultimately drove the organisation to look for immutable backup storage that would keep data safe even if ransomware compromised the wider environment.

The promise of Absolute Immutability, direct Veeam integration and straightforward management led SAT to Object First.

The Challenge

Before Object First, SAT used Network Attached Storage (NAS) as its primary backup storage solution. Fears about the resilience of this setup is what ultimately led the Trust to seek a new solution. Dan Wright, one of the ICT Hub Managers at SAT, explains:

"We experienced a cyber incident at one of our sites in 2020, which demonstrated how significantly an attack can affect recovery times and day-to-day operations. An immutable backup solution would have helped protect our recoverable data and potentially would have enabled us to restore services more quickly."

SAT's three greatest challenges were:

- **No immutability:** existing backup architecture did not include immutability, leaving backup data exposed to alteration during an attack.

Company:
Saffron Academy Trust (SAT)

Industry:
Education (Multi-Academy Trust)

Country:
United Kingdom

Solution:
Ootbi Appliance

Results:
Absolutely immutable backups, ransomware protection, stronger approach to compliance and resilience, seamless Veeam integration, more time for ICT teams.

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- **Simultaneous loss of production and backup data:** as a multi-site trust, SAT was concerned that a ransomware attack could affect its production systems and its backups at the same time.
- **Recovery time and downtime:** any delay in restoring services could disrupt teaching and learning across the Trust's schools.

The Solution

SAT set out four conditions for any new solution: it had to strengthen the security and resilience of the Trust's backup strategy, integrate with SAT's current environment, be simple to manage, and give the ICT team greater confidence in recovery.

SAT discovered Object First as part of its wider research into replacement backup solutions. The Ootbi backup storage appliance fulfilled all these conditions but stood out particularly for its direct Veeam integration. Ben Johnson, SAT's other ICT Hub Manager, explains:

"The direct integration with Veeam made Object First really stand out. It provided a straightforward fit with our existing backup environment and gave us confidence that the solution could be introduced without adding unnecessary complexity."

SAT's ICT team handled the deployment themselves. Johnson notes, **"The deployment was quick, straightforward and hassle-free... we were able to set it up, test it and provision it without issue."**

The Results

By implementing Object First, SAT addressed each of its key backup storage challenges:

- **Absolute immutability:** Backup data is now protected from ransomware, strengthening SAT's overall organisational resilience and approach to compliance
- **Backup storage separated:** Ootbi keeps SAT's backups apart from production systems and Veeam software. If ransomware strikes, backups stay intact and recoverable, reducing the risk of data loss and downtime.
- **Minimal downtime:** SAT's backup architecture is now designed to minimise downtime and support faster recovery, limiting the impact of any future incident on its schools.

Wright summarises the overall impact this has had on the team more widely:

"Object First has increased confidence across the ICT team in our ability to protect and recover critical data following a cyber incident. By reducing concerns around data loss and adding another resilient layer to our backup strategy, the team can spend less time worrying about recovery readiness and more time focusing on supporting schools and delivering wider ICT priorities."

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Conclusion

The cyber incident in 2020 was a real wake-up call for SAT, showing just how disruptive and costly a ransomware attack can be.

By adding Object First to its existing Veeam environment, SAT now has backup storage that ensures its data remains recoverable, whatever happens—without adding complexity for its ICT team.

Object First will remain an important part of SAT's backup and recovery strategy as the Trust continues to strengthen its cyber resilience architecture. Wright and Johnson summarise:

"Object First's absolutely immutable storage gives us greater confidence that critical data will remain protected and recoverable in the event of a cyber incident, helping us minimise downtime and disruption to teaching and learning."

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