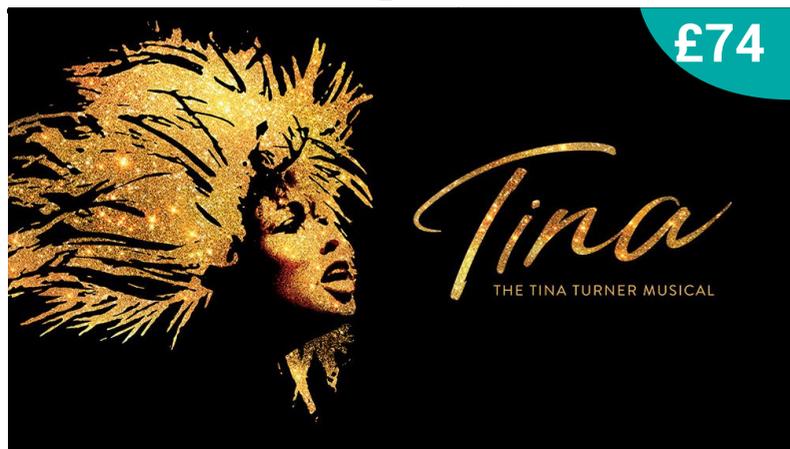


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**TECHNO BOOST:** Secretary Sue Wright says New Rickstones Academy couldn't have coped with the current coronavirus pandemic and lockdown so well without today's technology

# 'After 30 years this school is like a family to me'

## Sue first joined New Rickstones in 1990

A DEDICATED secretary has been showered with praise after marking three decades at a school.

Sue Wright has held a number of positions while working at New Rickstones Academy in Witham during the past 30 years, and has been credited for her role in helping it to improve.

Sue joined the school in 1990 and worked as an administration assistant under its first headteacher Norma Turner.

Since then she has worked with seven other headteachers and filled roles such as office manager, HR manager and the headteacher's PA.

Staff marked her 30th anniversary at the school by delivering gifts to her doorstep, with many watching her receive them during a virtual meeting.

New Rickstones headteacher Damian Lee has paid tribute to Sue's dedication and says she has played a key role in helping the school evolve.

He said: "To work anywhere for 30 years is a great achievement, but what Sue has done for the students, staff, parents and Witham community is nothing short of amazing."

"She has worked under every headteacher since the original Rickstones was built in the late 1970s.

"From a personal point of view, having worked very closely with Sue over the five years I have been headteacher,

To work anywhere for 30 years is a great achievement, but what Sue has done for the students, staff, parents and Witham community is nothing short of amazing

**Headteacher Damian Lee**

her knowledge of the families and local community has been instrumental in helping us to improve the academy drastically.

"I know students, staff and parents will be extremely proud of this achievement."

Sue is set to retire in April 2021 and remains hopeful the school can return to some sort of normality before she leaves.

New Rickstones has only been open to students whose parents are key workers during the coronavirus lockdown.

It was set to welcome back Year 10 students on Monday.

Sue says one of the biggest differences she has witnessed in her time at New Rickstones has been the advance of technology and insists it would have been impossible for any teaching to be done if a similar pandemic had occurred earlier in her career.

She said: "When I started, the details of every one of the 800

students were handwritten on a Rotadex filing system.

"I produced a tutor group bulletin each week on a wax stencil which I printed off one by one. It was so different then. Computers arrived in 1992 and made things a lot easier.

"We are lucky the lockdown has happened when we have the technology to teach children at home. Go back 30 years – or even 15 years – and the school would have just had to have shut.

"Every teacher is teaching and phone calls are being made home to students every week.

"Where would we have been if this had happened when I started here?"

One of the biggest changes at the school seen by Sue is the performance of teachers and children. Having been rated as 'requiring improvement' by Ofsted in the past, New Rickstones is now classified as 'good'.

And Sue is hopeful the academy will one day achieve the top rating of 'outstanding' in the coming years.

She added: "I am so proud to see the school get to where it needed to be – that is what I am most proud about. I have met some wonderful people and made friends for life.

"It is hard to put into words the impact Rickstones has on you. Once you are at Rickstones, you are part of a family – we all support each other and help each other out.

"If you broke me open, I would have Rickstones through me. It is a very special place."

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