



## *The Inclusive Education - "School Leader Interview"*

For [www.inclusiveeducation.ca](http://www.inclusiveeducation.ca)

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## **Ste. Anne Collegiate**



A little about the school – rural regional school, 320 students, diverse population (EAL, Aboriginal), part of a complex housing three schools (English high school, English elementary school and French immersion elementary school), majority of students are bussed to school (some students ride the bus up to a 1 hour and 45 ride one way), very active extra-curricular sports life.

### **Short Bio of Elaine Lochhead:**

- In the Seine River School Division:
  - Principal of Ste. Anne Collegiate for past 9 years
  - Resource teacher 13 years at both elementary and high school levels
  - Classroom teacher for 5 years
- Member of Manitoba Council for Exceptional Children, Manitoba Association of Resource Teachers
- Presenter at local, provincial and international levels
- Top two priorities in education – inclusion and literacy
- Married, three children, two grandchildren

## **The Questions & Answers:**

### **1. What does it mean to say your school is “inclusive”?**

Inclusiveness is our attitude – everyone is welcome, everyone has the opportunity to learn, everyone is part of the school life. When we plan activities everyone’s abilities are considered and the activity includes them. Even though our building is currently not physically inclusive (no elevator in a two storey building) we purposefully put classes on the main floor so that any students in wheelchairs can access courses.

### **2. What experiences do you have that have prepared you to provide “inclusive education” in your school?**

I have worked in our school division in a variety of roles, including resource positions at both the high school and elementary levels. Working with parents and students to have inclusion happen for their families was a wonderful way to learn along side of them; I believe helping schools to look at inclusion as a positive bonus for their building helped me learn how to make that happen when I became a principal.

### **3. Does inclusion get much attention in your school or community?**

I suppose it does by people outside of our school. Within the school it is how we function everyday. I know students in our building see all students as belonging – one student when asked if we had students with special needs said no. When

prompted about a particular student, the reply was he is just a student at our school. In the community people know we are a school that has students of all abilities and needs.

**4. Do you think school improvement and being an “inclusive school” are linked? Can you be specific how?**

I can't think how they can be separate. Schools continually need to improve and inclusiveness is part of that improvement. We are always learning how to do things better, and that means inclusion as well. I believe school improvement (inclusion is part of it) must always happen, every year, every month, every week. If we don't strive to improve we fall backwards.

**5. What unique challenges has inclusion presented recently? How have you dealt with them?**

Specifically in our school we are always challenged by our lack of space and lobby continually for access (facility accessibility). On a wider scale I believe that inclusion is seen by some people as an expensive option. It is NOT an option! There always have to be people willing to stand up and say that inclusion cannot be a budget issue.

**6. What have you learned or shared about inclusive education with colleagues in your school district?**

We share many successes and struggles. For some buildings, inclusion is part of what they do everyday and in some they are just beginning an inclusive journey. Certainly we share together what has worked in our particular buildings and that helps us become a stronger team. I believe that we have an inclusive attitude and we have to help our staffs and communities to see the benefits of inclusion.

**7. What strategies do you find help you make inclusion work in your school?**

When faced with questions from parents or staff or community members I stress that our school is a microcosm of society. We need to model inclusiveness. I use the example of an organization I belong to, there are people in wheelchairs, a blind man and many others with challenges that are not visible to the naked eye, we all belong and are part of a great organization; I wouldn't want to belong to an organization that excluded such great people.

I am not afraid to talk about inclusion – it is a topic at staff meetings and hallways discussions. We have to be prepared to listen to others who don't agree with us. We can't change their attitude, only they can, but we can model our beliefs so they see our philosophy in our actions.

**8. What is the toughest challenge in terms of assuring that teachers and parents are working together?**

Communication – ensuring that good communication is taking place.

**9. Can you share an example of how inclusion was successful for a teacher and/or student in your school?**

In my last school where I was a high school resource teacher, I always offered to go into a class where a highly challenged student was going to be attending to answer any questions and discuss plans for the student. When I approached a particular teacher who was going to have a student attending his geography class, and asked to talk to his class, he firmly said no!

I couldn't come in and talk to his class. I was quite taken aback and repeated my request emphasizing that the student was on oxygen and in a wheelchair and this was new for her. He again said no, I wasn't welcome. I finally said 'why?' He replied that the student was his student, she had a right to be in his class and I didn't have to explain to him or his students why she was there.

Hurrah!!

The student passed away shortly after her graduation; how grateful I am that the teacher gave her the experience of being one of his students.

**10. What advice would you give a principal just beginning to make his/her school "inclusive"?**

**Be patient; model what you believe; encourage discussion; remain firm and steadfast to your goal.**