Upper Plenty Primary School’s vision statement includes the promotion of lifelong learning in students. The school believes that staff should model this and the school’s principal, Kim Tierney, recognised that Performance and Development Culture could act as a vehicle for lifelong learning. She also recognised that this culture would have to be embedded throughout the school, including teachers and SSOs.

Like most small schools, there was already a good fundamental understanding of what a Performance and Development Culture looks like. An analysis of what the school was already doing acted as a starting point from which to develop other policies and processes to enhance the school’s Performance and Development Culture.

The school was also already meeting with a collegiate group of several other small school principals. It was decided that this was an ideal forum for the schools to support each other in the accreditation process.
Regional and central staff were invited to talk to the collegiate group about the process of developing a Performance and Development Culture and achieving accreditation. The group sought to gain a better insight into how others had gone about the task.

Schools who had been accredited were then invited to speak to the group about their journeys. People were more than happy to share their experiences and good practices, and the collegiate group was able to adopt ideas from the examples presented.

From there, group members were each allocated an element for which they were to source support. In some cases this meant gathering documentation and in others it meant providing guest speakers.

After support and information for each element had been provided, the group worked their way through each element together, sharing information on a regular basis during meetings and via email.

Performance and Development Culture issues were integrated into the existing meeting schedule so that it was not viewed as an additional workload.

The school highlighted to staff the importance of this process to ensure that the working environment was the best it could be. It recognised that if teachers did not understand its importance, then it was unlikely to work.

By the time Upper Plenty Primary School achieved accreditation all of the elements of a Performance and Development Culture were in place and it was reassuring to receive formal recognition for this.

Staff are now generally more aware of why their working environment is so positive and productive. Performance and Development Culture is considered to be crucial at Upper Plenty Primary School as it enables teachers to teach as well as they can and therefore allows the children to achieve their best.

The school is committed to facilitating targeted professional development, constructive feedback, opportunities for reflection, interaction with other peers and collegiate dialogue. It is committed to taking risks, refining practices and deepening understandings.

The biggest change for the school was the introduction of peer observation and mentoring. The accreditation process helped the staff to see the benefits of these new practices to accept that they were ready for them.
Upper Plenty Primary School is a Reference School in 2008. Principal, Kim Tierney, invites schools to visit Upper Plenty and is willing to share her knowledge and experiences with these schools. She will also visit other schools to talk about the process, welcoming the opportunity to gain further knowledge by doing so.

Upper Plenty is committed to lifelong learning and remains on the journey of continuous school improvement.