Instead of looking at what went wrong, celebrate what went right – this is the mantra behind a growing “21st century” approach to teaching.

Trinity Anglican College has begun implementing a new whole-school framework, heralded a success in Geelong and Sydney schools.

Pastoral care director Angela Lum began adopting the philosophy into her support for students years ago, extending its reach this year.

“What we’re introducing is a positive education model from prep all throughout to year 12,” she said.

“What I really love about the model is that we look at everybody – the staff, the parents, anyone who has anything to do with the college.”

“It’s about helping people manage and prevent mental illness and enhancing mental wellness.”

Positivity Institute senior associate Daniela Falecki said staff training was the first step with an aim to fully integrate the framework by the end of the year.

“A teacher or school embedding a positive education approach will have things like gratitude journals and they will have buddy systems,” she said.

“They will understand their character strengths and will have mindfulness training or do meditations.”

“They are examples of things that a positive education school will actually prioritise.”

“The two most common questions asked are what went well and following that with an ‘even better if’ – what would make the strategies that worked even better.”

“It’s very much solution-focused as opposed to looking at what went wrong.”

Ms Falecki said the ideology had been successful in other schools.
“The science and the research behind psychology is really what’s pushing this movement,” she said.

“The trailblazers are Geelong Grammar School and Knox College in Sydney.”

“The biggest successes at Geelong were around increases in engagement, their retention was higher and academic performance improved.”

“Generally the parents commented students were more happier and more satisfied with being at school.”

A study by the Positivity Institute conducted with 383 Geelong students found year 9 students’ well-being increased by 3 points on a scale to 100 over a year.

Ms Falecki said the framework shifted focus from the “bottom end” of the psychology scale to those “flourishing at the top”.

“The World Health Organisation has depression as being the leading cause of illness for 2030,” she said.

“Instead of studying what’s going wrong, what the positive psychology movement research has been about is what’s working well and what makes us thrive.”