

they now cater for children aged two to 11, created the Community Food Pantry, and opened its Forest School.

Test results overall for its 11-year-olds are below the average for the Isle of Wight and nationwide. But Oakfield caters for the highest number of disadvantaged children of any primary school on the island, with 45 per cent claiming free school meals. Almost a quarter of its 11-year-olds this summer were unable to even access the tests, yet their results were included in the overall statistics.

Campaigners have also pointed out that Oakfield is the only primary in the eastern half of Ryde, and that families – many of whom don't have cars – would have to walk almost two miles on hilly terrain to reach alternative schools. The nearest C of E school is Brading Primary, which is 4.2 miles away and is also scheduled for closure.

It has also proved itself to be very good at being a church school. A Church of England inspector recently gave it an 'excellent' grading, praising its Christian vision and ethos, as well as bold decisions in learning and inventive ways to enhance wellbeing.

The school has good links with the new team of clergy that are developing our churches in Ryde, and the Rev David Morgan visits regularly to lead collective worship.

Mrs Reader said: "The sense of community is stronger than ever here. We provide all sorts of extra-curricular opportunities to give children as many experiences as possible.

"We have a parent and community group, we're affiliated to a sailing club that gives children a chance to learn how to sail, and we have a sports week when we expose children to different kinds of sport all week.

Rural school offers love, hope and courage

THESE children and their parents can't help talking about how much they love their school. They know Arreton St George's C of E Primary is a great example of a rural, church school that feels part of the community.

They cite the dedication of staff, exciting lessons, extra-curricular clubs, its rural setting and smaller class sizes as good reasons why it should stay open. And they know its Christian values permeate through everything that happens there.

Eight-year-old Henry Wilkes-Jones, who lives in Arreton, said: "I absolutely love this school. The whole place is amazing. We learn so much in lessons, we have great after-school clubs and great school trips."

And Charlie Rogers, aged seven, who also lives in the village, said: "Lots of people love the values of Love, Hope and Courage. It makes it a better school because people are kinder."

Headteacher Nicky Coates has already told the Isle of Wight Council that 81 per cent of her

pupils live in the south of the island, meaning the proposed closure of schools in Arreton, Godshill and Wroxall will force families living there to travel much further to school. She also values the links with St George's Church in Arreton – pupils go to the church for services and the vicar, the Rev Kath Abbott, visits the school regularly.

"Being a church school runs through everything we do," she said. "Rev Kath comes into school and talks to children about faith in a language they understand. And parents appreciate our Christian values, whether they have faith or not.

"We pride ourselves for being fully inclusive, and we provide sensory circuits, bushcraft, cookery, emotional literacy support and regular outside movement to help children's communication and mental health needs.

"And we have a high level of children with special needs – around a third of pupils. They are happy here, so it will be counterproductive to send them to



other schools."

Parents, who have been campaigning to keep the school open since the plans were announced, agree that its Christian ethos makes a big difference.

Amy Westlotorn, mum to Jasper and Maddie, said: "I live in East Cowes and this is the nearest C of E school to me that has places. It provides church services, worship, and its smallness is an advantage – every teacher knows their children well."

And Kayleigh Harris, whose son Oakley is in Year R, said: "The school is very inclusive, community-based and has strong links with the church. I'm proud of its values and my son has settled very well here.

"There is so much variety in the extra-curricular clubs, which enhances their learning. And the earlier start-time helps working parents who can drop off children and go to work."

And Jenna Jenkins said her



Left: cookery club at Arreton C of E Primary; above: Year 6s playing rugby

children George and Arthur love its location as they can visit the Shipwreck Museum in Arreton and the Garlic Farm in Newchurch on school trips. Pupils can reach the countryside on foot, rather than having to get on coaches.



Forest School with children from the nursery at Oakfield C of E Primary

"Every child gets a lesson outdoors every day, and that's in addition to regular Forest School lessons. For nursery children to have this access to nature is really important, and we're fortunate to have such an

amazing site where we can do that.

"We also run Acorn Clubs and Acorn Awards, which are achievements that pupils can work towards, similar to scout badges. It really



Year 6 pupils in the classroom at Oakfield C of E Primary

helps to promote children's enrichment, as they work towards badges in everything from crochet to football, from beekeeping to "Warhammer" battle games. A lot of our children excel in areas such as

art, music and sport, which aren't always measured by statistics."

In their submission to the Isle of Wight Council, our Diocesan Board of Education has queried the

council's rationale for closure of all three C of E schools. Its view is that surplus places and demography are better reasons for closure than overall academic standards, which can fluctuate and which don't actually measure individual pupils' progress.

It has also told the council it should not consider the potential future of a school site when considering closure. The Isle of Wight Council's consultation document identifies possible uses for all three C of E school sites, but none of these ideas may be possible and it is not the local authority's decision in any case.

For more information about the proposed school closures and how to register your opposition, see: www.portsmouth.anglican.org/IWschools.