

[National](#) [Victoria](#) [City life](#)

AB/CD, Primary Scream: Parents turning it up to 11 in school rock band battle

[Carolyn Webb](#)

December 3, 2023 – 6.45pm

It's Sunday afternoon and relatives watch proudly in a schoolyard as rock bands belt out bangers like *Start Me Up* by the Rolling Stones and The Offspring's *Come Out and Play*.

But today it isn't kids emulating AC/DC and Alanis Morissette at a music festival at Middle Park Primary School. It's a showcase for Parents Battle of the Bands, whose participants are living out their teenage dreams.



Having a rocking good time: Phil Isard singing with Middle Park primary school parents' band Middle Sparks. EDDIE JIM

With the volume turned up to 11 they aren't too shy to play ripping guitar to *Better* by the Screaming Jets, or to sing Ritchie Valens' *La Bamba* in Spanish.

Parents from 15 Melbourne primary schools now compete in Parents Battle of the Bands (PBOB), with names like AB/CD (Elwood primary) and Double Denim (Fairfield Primary). PBOB is a registered charity and has raised \$77,000 for kids' music education.

On Sunday seven of the bands took part in a PBOB mini-festival, but several times a year crowds of over 500 watch them compete against one another at venues such as St Kilda's Prince Bandroom.

Last month Port Melbourne Primary parents' band The Last Port won the grand final — the inaugural Northside versus Southside (suburbs) competition at Richmond's storied Corner Hotel.



Time of their lives: Phil Isard, second from left, in cap and sunglasses performs with Middle Sparks at a Southside schools competition at Prince Bandroom in May.

Tay Pappas, a singer with St Kilda Primary School parents' band, Primary Scream, who sang in choirs at school, said she would never have thought she'd front a band singing songs like ABBA's *Gimme! Gimme! Gimme! (A Man After Midnight)*.

The adrenaline high of performing is incredible, she says, and there are mental health benefits.

"I've got a really full-on job as general manager of a homewares brand. I've got three kids and that's kind of been my hobby for years," Pappas said.

"And now I am lead singer in a band. It's just so much fun. The band is awesome.

"It's certainly been life-changing, to reconnect with music.

"I feel like it's opened a whole new dimension and I know others in the band feel that, too." Pappas' daughter Clover Fleetwood, 12, said some kids were embarrassed by their parents, but she was proud and her friends say it's cool that her mum is in a band.

Phil Isard, a singer with Middle Park primary's parent band Middle Sparks, sometimes casually mentions to workmates that he is off to band practice for a gig on the weekend.



Tay Pappas, centre, flanked by Simon Rashleigh and her sister Zoe Pappas, sings with the St Kilda Primary School parents' band Primary Scream at a festival at Middle Park primary school on Sunday. EDDIE JIM

"They go, 'what? You're in a band?'" Isard says.

He responded to an ad for the band put in the school newsletter by the school's principal Tim Newton.

"I said to Tim, 'look, I love to sing, but I've had no training and I'm not sure I'm good and it'," Isard said. "And he said, 'you're in'.

"It's about participation. When you rehearse, you leave whatever stresses that are in your life and it's about the music, getting the timing right.



Ripponlea Primary School band the Ripoffs perform at Prince Bandroom in May.

“It’s a good distraction and a good place to go to, to do something else and to enjoy it with a group of friends, have a laugh.

“Somebody might bring a bottle of red to enjoy. It’s good camaraderie and friendship.” Isard’s wife Paula Waters, who on Sunday also watched their son Jacob, 9, play guitar in kids’ band the Golden Chillies, said it had become a passion for her husband, who sings around the house.

“He just loves it,” Waters said.



Having fun: Parents Battle of the Bands CEO Anna Vermooten, right, and operations manager Dagmar Yeaman. EDDIE JIM

Parents Battle of the Bands founder and CEO Anna Vermooten said the organisation is seeking funding from governments, philanthropy or the corporate sector.

Vermooten and PBOB head of operations Dagmar Yeaman are not paid for their work and use donated offices.

Vermooten said PBOB gets weekly emails from schools across Australia that are keen to join the program, and at least five Melbourne bands are expected to join next year.

You can support Parents Battle of the Bands at parentsbattleofthebands.com.

The Morning Edition newsletter is our guide to the day's most important and interesting stories, analysis and insights. [Sign up here.](#)



Carolyn Webb is a reporter for The Age. Connect via [email](#).