

NEWS

Rocking kids aim for stars

This vocal group has made the finals of the Aim to Fame competition. If they win, they'll be off to the US to compete against 50 other groups. *Valerie Schuler reports*



KELLY, SAM, ALICE, ANDREW AND HANNAH MAKE UP THE GROUP KIDZ ROCK

PHOTO: SYLVIE WHINRAY

Sam Verlinden wants to be an All Black when he grows up. "But a pop star will do for now," the 10-year-old laughs.

Sam started singing when he was just two years old. "When he was five, he sang at a school concert and made everyone cry," says his mother, Bronwyn.

Sam sounds a bit like a young Michael Jackson. But, as the youngest member of North Shore-based vocal band Kidz Rock, he is finding a voice of his own in a group that is taking great strides. The two boys and three girls, aged 10 to 15, have made the national

finals of the annual Aim to Fame competition, coming up in March.

If they win, they will be off to Los Angeles in July to compete against 50 other countries.

"These kids are just amazing," says Aim to Fame organiser Dina van Rensburg.

"They have that certain X-factor and are incredibly confident for their age."

Sam, Andrew Papas, 14, Hannah Elley, 12, Alice Finnigan, 11, and Kelly Thomas, 15, all have backgrounds in theatre. They have sung together only since last year and have no training as a group. But they harmonise beautifully,

says Dina.

The children met at musical theatre classes at Forrest Hill Primary School in 2005.

"One of our parents suggested we start a band and it all sort of evolved from there," says Kelly.

They have been rehearsing weekly and performing at private functions to raise money.

"We are pretty hopeful that we'll get there," says Andrew, who is in year 10 at Long Bay College.

Kidz Rock will also perform at this year's Pasifika Festival at Western Springs on March 8.

■ www.kidzrock.co.nz