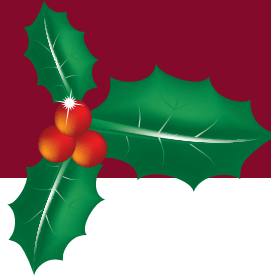


last week



NEWS

Labour's flagship academy schools have been accused of inflating their exam results by shunning tough subjects. In a damning report, researchers said evidence strongly suggested that schools gained good grades by entering pupils in "easier" vocational courses such as computing, catering and travel and tourism.

The Daily Telegraph noted these findings from thinktank Civitas come only weeks after Ofsted assessed half the private sector-sponsored schools to be no better than adequate.

A Wigan man has been crowned the Pie-Eating World Champion after polishing off a pie in just 47 seconds. Barry Rigby, 36, from Beech Hill, beat off stiff competition, including last year's winner, to win the prestigious crown.

From www.wigantoday.net. For the first year, tournament organisers in the pie eating capital of the world were forced to do drug tests on competitors after finding some were using cough medicine to lubricate the passage of the little beauties down their throats.

Changes are likely to be made to the document dictating acceptable parliamentary language in the Dáil and Seanad after Green Party TD Paul Gogarty's defence of his use of an expletive in the Dáil last week. The 18-member Dáil committee on procedure and privileges, which meets tomorrow, will deal with Mr Gogarty's use of the f-word, directed against Labour party whip Emmet Stagg.

From the Irish Times. Gogarty, speaking in a debate on social welfare, was heckled by the Labour deputy and responded with a terse, well aimed epithet.

Hospital cleaners are worth more to society than city bankers, according to a new



IN PICTURES

Liverpool Catholic Cathedral photographed by Nathan Batterbee, 19, a participant in the My City My World project run by Liverpool City Council and the charity PhotoVoice. They ran photo workshops for young people living in the city's children's homes, as well as those with learning difficulties and physical disabilities, and the resulting work went on show at Liverpool's Bluecoat Gallery.



Sherece Bernard and Leah Jay McClellan from Manchester starred in the Royal Northern College of Music's production of Menotti's Christmas opera *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. The girls enrolled on the college's outreach programme, funded by the government's Aiming High for Young People initiative to increase the participation of young people, predominantly those from disadvantaged areas or at risk of anti-social behaviour or crime, in positive leisure time activities.

method of calculating the value of different jobs. The New Economics Foundation called for a "fundamental rethink" of how the value of work was recognised and rewarded.

From the Independent.

A pair of fraudsters were paid to take driving tests by dozens of cheats – but failed most of them. Ali Abdullah, 28, and Muqtar Nuren, 22, took 27 practical and 16 theory tests between them for 35 different candidates on a "no pass, no fee" basis. But they were such bad drivers they only passed seven practical and three theory tests between them.

Abdullah's lawyer admitted the scam was "spectacularly unsophisticated". From the Manchester Evening News.

ON THE NET

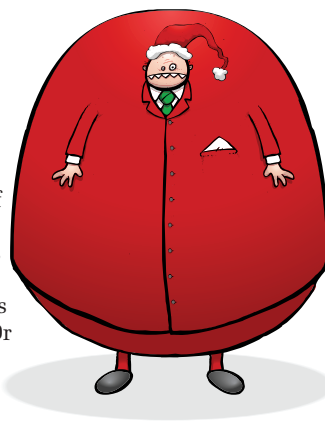
Santa should share Rudolf's snack of carrots and celery sticks rather than brandy and mince pies and swap his reindeer for a bike or walk, says a public health expert in the Christmas issue published on bmj.com today. Dr Nathan Grills, from Monash University in Australia, says the current image of Santa promotes obesity, drink-driving, speeding and a general unhealthy lifestyle.

Good grief. You can imagine what a joyous occasion Xmas is in the Grills household.

QUOTE

... where all of Tiger's confirmed mistresses have gathered to vote! Vote? On what? On whether to unionize.

Reporter Roland Hedley in a two-way in Garry Trudeau's peerless Doonesbury cartoon strip.



Tom Jones, by legendary celebrity photographer Harry Goodwin, from Manchester, who was honoured last week with a lifetime achievement award from the city's Lord Mayor.