

# Former Alice Springs principal Gavin Morris guilty on four counts of aggravated assault against students



By Matthew Qvortrup

Courts

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Gavin Morris has been found guilty of physically assaulting four children. (ABC News)

## In short:

Gavin Morris, the former principal of Yipirinya School in Alice Springs, has been found guilty on four out of five counts of aggravated assault.

Judge Anthony Hopkins found Morris choked a student, put another in a chokehold, and dragged two students by the ear.

## What's next?

Morris is due to be sentenced in the Alice Springs Local Court in December.

A prominent former Alice Springs principal has been found guilty on four of five counts of aggravated assault against students, after a judge-only trial.

**WARNING: This story contains racist and offensive language.**

Gavin Morris, the former principal of Yipirinya School — an independent school for Indigenous children in Alice Springs — stood trial on the five counts in the Alice Springs Local Court in August and September, with the court hearing almost two weeks of evidence.



Gavin Morris is the former principal of Alice Springs independent school, Yipirinya School. (ABC News: Charmayne Allison)

Prosecutors alleged Morris physically assaulted five students at the school in incidents occurring between 2023 and 2024.

Morris pleaded not guilty to all charges.

On Wednesday, Alice Springs Local Court Judge Anthony Hopkins found Morris guilty on four of the five counts, including choking one student, holding another in a chokehold, and dragging two pupils by their ears.

He found Morris not guilty on the fifth count, in which he was alleged to have choked a different pupil.

During the trial, the defence argued that Morris had acted to restrain students who were either getting into fights or misbehaving.



John Wilson (left) acted as the former principal's defence lawyer throughout the trial. (ABC News: Xavier Martin)

That argument was rejected by Judge Hopkins, who not only found that the students were not misbehaving, but also that Morris's behaviour was "not justified".

**"Grabbing a student by the throat and making it difficult to breathe is not justified behaviour," he said.**

Regarding the incident in which Morris dragged two students by their ears, the judge said: "Forcible removal that causes pain and stinging is not a justified defence".

Judge Hopkins said that on certain occasions, "certain restraint can be justified as a defence", but that did "not apply in [this] case".



A judge, with no jury, presided over the trial in the Alice Springs Local Court. (ABC News: Xavier Martin)

Regarding the fifth count, for which Morris was found not guilty, Judge Hopkins said he "could not ascertain beyond reasonable doubt that the incident had taken place, on the basis of the evidence".

## Racial slurs accompanied two offences

The judge also found Morris directed racial slurs at students during two of the incidents, accepting testimony given by students and staff members at trial.

Those included Morris calling one pupil "a little black c\*\*\*" during one of the choking incidents, and calling another a "black dog" while referring to other students as "black creatures" on a separate occasion.

Judge Hopkins said, with the Yipirinya School an institution "for Aboriginal children where all the students are

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Indigenous", the racial slurs constituted an aggravating circumstance.

The judge said he found the evidence given by the victims — whose ages cannot be reported for legal reasons — "was careful and compelling and without discrepancies".

Morris started as the principal of Yipirinya School in 2021.

He was charged in August 2024, and his teacher registration was suspended later that year, before he was terminated from his principal role.

He also previously served as a councillor at the Alice Springs Town Council, but resigned in March this year.

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Morris was found guilty on four out of the five counts he was charged with. (ABC News)

Speaking outside of court after the judgement was handed down, Morris said: "It's been a big day, we'll just leave it at that".

Asked if he intended to appeal the judgement, he said: "I can't really make any comment today, but yeah, we'll just deal with what we've got there and work out a way forward."

Morris is due to be sentenced on December 8.

His bail has been extended until that date.

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